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**THE CONTEMPORARY APPROACH TO THE QUESTION
OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS IN E.P. SANDERS: A
THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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ABBREVIATIONS

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| Acts | The Acts of the Apostles |
| 1 Cor | The first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians |
| Colo | Letter of Saint Paul to the Colosians |
| Dt | The boook of Deuteronomy |
| Ed | Editor |
| Ed | Edition |
| Ex | The book of Exodus |
| Matt | The Gospel of Matthew |
| Mk | The Gospel of Mark |
| Lk | The Gospel of Luke |
| Jn | The Gospel of John |
| Phil | The Letter of Saint Paul to the Philipians |
| Rom | The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans |
| Zech | Zecharia |

ABSTRACT

This piece of academic research seeks to explore the question of the Historical Jesus and its relevance in our contemporary world. This research aims at enlightening modern minds about the person of Jesus. A long the history so many things were said about the historical Jesus, scholars and critical minds sit and have a round table discussion about the person of the historical Jesus, however, the aftermath of their discussion only offer us an idea of who the person of the historical Jesus was. In their quest to unmask the real identity of the historical Jesus, these great scholars present to us diverse interpretations of the historical Jesus according to their Christological orientations. However, some of these images do not offer us an in-depth information about the person of the historical Jesus. They only offer us superficial information about the person of Jesus. The best way to have access to the person of the historical Jesus is to study him holistically with consideration of the environment he grew up.

Therefore, this research seeks to investigate the history of Jesus not depending solely on the reports of the New Testament Writings, but also references will be made to some vital materials outside the New Testament that contain crucial information about Jesus. The above assertion is not in any way relegating to the background the importance of the New Testament writings as our basic sources of information about the historical Jesus; however, we wish to investigate if something can be known about the historical Jesus outside the New Testament Writings.

In this research we shall equally address the contemporary approach to the question of the historical Jesus. This contemporary approach to the question of the historical Jesus, seeks to study everything about the historical Jesus in the context of his immediate environment and all the activities that shaped the life of this great figure of history. We do hope that studying the life of the historical Jesus from this perspective would to a very large extent unfold and offer us fundamental and first-hand information about the person of Jesus. Our intention in this academic research is not basically a critique, but an exposition of the various contributions of authors about this subject under investigation. We do hope this piece of academic research will be of great help to you.

KEY WORDS: Historical Jesus, E.P. Sanders, the New Testament Writings, the non-Christian testimony about the historical Jesus.

RESUMO

Neste trabalho acadêmico vamos abordar a questão de Jesus histórico e o seu fundamento no mundo contemporânea. A questão de Jesus histórico continua a ser uma questão central e fundamental no mundo contemporâneo, para os que querem ter um conhecimento profundo acerca da sua figura. Assim, várias figuras acadêmica na antiguidade e no mundo contemporânea apresentam figura de Jesus histórico, das perspectivas distintas, segundo a sua orientação cristológica. Todavia, estas imagens não nos oferecem uma visão ampla e panorâmica acerca da pessoa de Jesus histórico.

Dito isso, esta investigação teológica sobre a questão de Jesus histórico não vai estudar apenas as informações dos Evangelhos sobre a figura de Jesus, mas também vai analisar e estudar outras fontes fora dos Evangelhos que contém as informações básicas sobre Jesus. Com esta afirmação não estamos a desvalorizar a importância dos Evangelhos como fontes fundamental e principal da investigação de Jesus histórico, mas queremos apenas afirmar que além dos relatos dos Evangelhos há muitas informações e testemunhos úteis sobre a pessoa de Jesus nos textos não cristãos acerca de Jesus.

Assim sendo, iremos, nesta pesquisa acadêmica, apresentar a noção contemporânea de Jesus o seu fundamento no mundo atual. Vamos estudar a vida de Jesus histórico com uma atenção ao ambiente em que Ele cresceu e desempenhou a sua missão messiânica neste mundo. Nesta dissertação, achamos indispensável estudar a vida de Jesus histórico, situando-o no seu ambiente próprio, e através daquilo que Ele tinha realizado quando estava no nosso mundo. Estudando Jesus nesta perspectiva, oferece-nos muitas informações úteis acerca d'Ele. Como já tínhamos dito no início, a nossa intenção nesta dissertação, não é basicamente a desvalorização das fontes do Novo Testamento como fontes fundamental da nossa pesquisa, mas sim queremos mostrar que Jesus histórico pode ser estudado numa perspectiva diferente daquilo que já tínhamos visto nos evangelhos.

PALAVRAS CHAVES: Jesus histórico, E.P. Sanders, Escritos do Novo Testamento, as fontes não cristãs acerca de Jesus histórico.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

There was a man who died about 2000 years ago, but his memory still lingers on. Every age talked about this man: kingdoms, rulers, and nations continue to reflect about his personality even after his death. Many never met him during his public ministry but believe in his existence and supremacy. This very man never stayed too long in this vale of tears, but his actions and attitudes impacted generations after him and to those yet unborn. He never wrote anything, no account of his life while on earth, yet many wrote about him. During his salvific mission here on earth, he was misunderstood by many because of his radical approach to resolving issues. Many addressed him as a king, yet he ended his career on the wood of the cross as a criminal. One mysterious thing about this figure is that, he remained resolute even in the face of death. His birth was mysterious and his departure from this world was equally mysterious. This figure is no other person than “Jesus of Nazareth”. This is the figure this dissertation seeks to investigate. One of the things that aroused our admiration for this great figure in the words of Gerald ‘O Collins is that:

“Jesus who had proclaimed God’s reign with divine authority and compassion now became silent and inactive in death. After gaining a certain popularity and gathering some followers, Jesus was finally to be found not with society’s winners but crucified between two of society’s failures.”¹

Jesus as a matter of fact is a figure whose personality and memory remain indelible in the hearts of men and women who believe and cherish his worthiness in their lives. The importance of this great figure who has affected human history positively cannot be underestimated. Every generation speaks of the wonders and incomprehensibility of this great figure. Many do not fathom this figure either, yet they believe him as the Saviour of the world who has assumed human nature to alleviate humanity from adamic nature. He was considered as the supreme ruler of the entire human race whose kingship extends to the ends of the earth, yet some still doubt the authenticity of his kingship. The Scriptures acknowledge the fact that during Jesus’ ministry here on earth, many expressed their doubt about his personality especially when he performed a miracle that seems to

¹ G. O’COLLINS, *Contemporary Christian Insights: Interpreting Jesus*, Mowbray, London and New York, 2000, 74.

elude the comprehension of people. One of these occasions can be seen in the following biblical reference:

“They woke him and said to him, “master, do you not care? We are lost”. And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to sea, “quite now! Be calm!” And the wind dropped, and there followed a great calm. They were overcome with awe and said to one another, who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.”²

In furtherance of the above, we have another case in the bible where authorities and rulers questioned his identity. One of these cases is: “then some of the Pharisees said, that man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath. Others said, how can a sinner produce sign like this?” (Jn. 9, 16).

When we carefully study the Scriptures, there are various instances where the identity of the person of Jesus was questioned or misunderstood because of the manner he approached certain delicate issues of his time. Therefore, our understanding of the person of Jesus is limited and our knowledge of the person of Jesus is at the superficial level. But the good news in the words of Gerald O’Collins is that “all these experiences and expectations led the first Christians to richly varied ways of naming, describing and proclaiming Jesus of Nazareth. For example, when they thought of his being uniquely related to the father for the salvation of the world, they called him “Son of God.”³

In the final analysis, we will like to continue with our reflection by making reference to the words of Schyler Brown who in his intention to give importance to the figure of Jesus wrote:

“The most obvious unifying element in the New Testament writings is their common concern for the person of Jesus Christ. It is therefore impossible to write about the origin of Christianity without a chapter on the person to whom earliest Christian community believed it owed its existence.”⁴

The above affirmation characterised what informed my desire in reflecting about the figure of Jesus. The person of Jesus continues to be a figure that caught the admiration of many across the globe to the point that, even after his death his memory lingers on. So

² Mk 4: 39-41.

³ O. C. GERALD, *Contemporary Christian Insights*, 12.

⁴ S. BROWN, *The Origin of Christianity: A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, Oxford University Press, and New York, 1993, 48.

many great and celebrated leaders across the globe died and after their death, very little is said or remembered about them. Even some of these leaders achieved greater things while on earth, but these achievements say little about them. However, Jesus was a leader with a distinction. He was not a political leader neither was he considered as somebody from a very influential background. Even the way he ended his life here on earth portrays that he was not an individual that deserves to be remembered because he ended cruelly and shamefully on the wood of the cross. This same figure whom society rejected when he was in the world turned out to be a universal figure that attracted many followers who continue to adore and worship him even after his shameful departure from this world. Jesus is indeed unique, and his uniqueness outshines other religious leaders who were in the world before his arrival.

Jesus becomes the focal point and the subject of discussion among various Christian denominations because of his uniqueness. In view of this, Rausch Thomas P. writes:

“The earliest presentation of him in Christian art found in the catacombs, portrayed him as a shepherd. The medieval Christians often saw Jesus as the coming judge who would separate the saved from the damned, a scene frequently represented over the lintels of their Churches.”⁵

Jesus is a figure endowed with the divine mandate of bringing to accomplishment the will of the Father. His conception marks the beginning of orderliness in this chaotic world. His birth gives meaning to our existence. His incarnation gives birth to a new dawn in human history and which equally gives rise to the dethronement of the princes of this world. Jesus is a figure who gives hope and tranquillity to a society where war and hatred become the order of the day. As we have earlier mentioned at the beginning of this reflection, the relevance of Jesus cannot be over emphasised in the history of humanity.

The person of Jesus continues to be very significant in our lives. In the history of humanity, Jesus is the only person who lived with a high level of confidence and died innocently. Where can we find in this world a man like Jesus? All human logic is insufficient to unravel the figure of Jesus. His intellectual and moral disposition together with his religious orientations, assume a proportion that defile any human interpretation. His life is like a strange poem from a strange land that contains vital information. The

⁵ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 2003, 1.

religious, human and moral figure of Jesus appears like something new to us. All that surrounds him does not explain vividly his personality. It is only Jesus who can offer us a definitive and logical explanation of his personality.⁶ Jesus is a man that one lacks appropriate words to describe. When we carefully study the words of Simeon at the dedication of Jesus at the temple, we discover that Simeon clearly portrays that Jesus is a paradoxical figure when he said to Mary, the mother of Jesus, “look, he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be sign that is opposed and a sword will pierce your soul too, so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare” (Lk 2, 33-35). This is a perfect expression that clearly reveals that, Jesus even as a child manifested some characteristics that showcased him like one who cannot be comprehended.

Each century has its personal image of the person of Jesus, the same is applicable in the different phases of primitive Christianity. In the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is the celestial high Priest and in the patristics, Jesus assumed human nature to divinise man. Jesus is our brother who accompanies us and shows us what we are expected to do to alleviate the predicament of our fellow human beings.⁷ The person of Jesus continues to be the focal point of every trends and movement who try as much as possible to fathom and interpret his personality. The more we try as much as possible to unravel the mystery behind this great figure, the more we obscure or conceal his real identity. It is based on this we will like to join our voice with that of Saint Paul when he says:

“It is of the mysterious wisdom of God that we talk, the wisdom that was hidden, which God predestined to be for our glory before the ages began. None of the rulers of the age recognized it; for if they had recognised it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”.⁸

The descriptions we have seen so far in this introduction about the person of Jesus are very vital, but they do not give us a complete and accurate description about the person of Jesus. All we know about the person of Jesus is superficial, because the personality of Jesus goes beyond what we think of him. Knowing Jesus implies having a deep, personal and in-depth relationship with him. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is basically to study the life of the historical Jesus from a contemporary perspective. This dissertation

⁶ Cf. K. ADAMS, *Jesus Cristo*, Literar Institut P. Hass & Cie. Kg. In Augsburg, (8^o ed), 1949, 65-67.

⁷ Cf. E. SCHILLEBECKX, *Jesús: La Historia de un Viviente*, Ediciones Cristiandad, Huesca, Madrid, 1981, 55.

⁸ 1Cor 2,6-8.

seeks to investigate if anything can be known about the person of the historical Jesus. It will equally examine the position of the contemporary biblical scholar E. P. Sanders, his contributions and his recommendations on the best way of studying the historical Jesus. We shall equally address the ideas of various authors who situate the study of the historical Jesus using the New Testament writings as the basic and fundamental sources.

The first chapter of this work seeks to give a general and holistic approach to the formative years of Jesus, the early life of the historical Jesus, historical Jesus: his family background, the academic qualifications, the Jewish origin of Jesus, the impact of John the Baptist on his personhood, the general approach to the preaching and the teaching ministry of Jesus. The second chapter explores the theological insights of the quest for the historical Jesus. It will address the following: The Old quest, the New Quest, the Third Quest, Jesus Seminar, and the biblical testimonies about the historical Jesus. Apart from this, the ideas of the various scholars on this subject would equally be highlighted here. Chapter three takes up the contemporary approach to the question of the historical Jesus from the perspective of E. P. Sanders, the evidence of the historical Jesus in Flavius Josephus, the evidence of the historical Jesus in Tacitus, the importance of dates and astronomy, it will evaluate the predicaments of using the New Testament writings as the only sources for the historical Jesus, the emergence of the Gospel, the authorship of the Gospel, convergence and divergence between the synoptic Gospel and the Fourth Gospel, studying the historical Jesus from the perspective of the history of salvation, the style of Jesus' ministry, the point of departure of Jesus' ministry, and finally we shall examine the recommendations of Sanders on the importance of not limiting our knowledge about Jesus on the New Testament sources.

The approach adopted in this piece of work is expository. My reflection will dwell more on what different scholars and authors said about this subject matter and my own contribution. This piece of academic work is not a critique but an exposition. I wish you a happy reading.

CHAPTER ONE

BASIC/GENERAL APPROACH TO THE LIFE OF JESUS

It is obvious that Jesus continues to be the focal point of many spiritualities, especially Christian spirituality. Some of us were born and brought up in an environment where people talk frequently about Jesus. Others later in years heard of him. In the words of Maurice Casey, Jesus “is a major symbol in our culture. Most of us belong to social subgroups which have a definite view of him. Many believed that Jesus is the second person of the trinity, God the Son, and when he lived on earth he performed miracles.”⁹ As such, Jesus becomes the centre of attraction of every race, colour, and nation. It is in the light of the above that this chapter seeks to usher us into the world of Jesus. It seeks to explore the basic and fundamental information about the formative years of Jesus. It will carefully trace all the necessary stages of Jesus’ history while he was on earth. The following will be examined in this chapter: the early life of the historical Jesus; the Jewish origin of the historical Jesus; the impact of John the Baptist on the historical Jesus; the general approach to the Preaching and teaching Ministry of Jesus and finally a synthesis and conclusion.

In the New Testament, the name of Jesus appears 919 times referring principally to Jesus of Nazareth. It was later that other personalities began bearing the name Jesus in the Gospel. The name of Jesus appears frequently in the Gospels. It occurs in the Gospel of John 244 times, in the Gospel of Matthew 153 times, in the Gospel of Luke 88 times, and in the Gospel of Mark 82 times. Apart from the above, the name of Jesus also occurs in the Writings of saint Paul: Romans 37 times, 1Corinthians 26 times, Philippians 22 times, and in Ephesians 20 times. Apart from the third letter of Saint John, the name of Jesus appears in the other writings of the New Testament.¹⁰ The name Jesus equally occurred in the LXX as the transcription of the name *Yeshosua* and later became, *Yesua*. Apart from Jesus of Nazareth, other personalities were equally given this name. For instance, Josuah the high Priest (Zach 3,1). It was in the second century that the use of the name Jesus or *Yesua* disappeared in Judaism.¹¹ However, according to G. Schneider in the

⁹ M. CASEY, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent historian’s account of his life and teachings*, Published by T&T Clark International, London, 2010, 1.

¹⁰ Cf. G. SCHNEIDER, “*Iesous Jesús*” in *Diccionario Exegetico Del Nuevo Testamento*, Horst Balz Gerhard Schneider, (ed), Vol.1, Ediciones Siguem Salamanca, 1996, 1973.

¹¹ Cf. G. SCHNIEDER, “*Iesous Jesús*” in *Diccionario Exegetico*, Vol.1. 1973.

Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, “at the time of Jesus of Nazareth, it was widespread, and the names meant originally Yahweh helps/is salvation.”¹² However, to create a clear-cut disparity between Jesus and other individuals who go by the same name when he was on earth, E.P. Sanders in the *Dictionary of the Bible* writes:

“For greater specificity, in his lifetime he was called son of Joseph, Jesus of Nazareth, or Jesus the Nazarene. Christ is a title, the English form of Greek *Christos*, “anointed”. Acts 2:36 and other passages show knowledge that the Christ was properly a title but in many New Testament writings including Paul’s letters, the name and the title are used as Jesus’ name. Paul sometimes simply used Christ as Jesus’ name.”¹³

In view of the foregoing, it is very imperative we ask ourselves this question, ‘who then is Jesus of Nazareth’? Justice would be done to this question that has been bothering critical minds. However, to give an answer to the above question, there is every need for us to know something about the personality of Jesus: his birth, where he lived, what he preached and taught and so on.¹⁴ Another important fact that should be considered here is the fact that Jesus never wrote anything down in the form of his biography. The substantial record we have about him came to us through the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). However, these Gospels are not historical materials in the modern scientific sense. They (Gospels) are simply words, attitudes, actions and the deeds of Jesus which were explained by the apostles and evangelists that believed in him as the Messiah of the people of Israel and the Son of God who ended his public life on the wood of the cross, and resurrected and continues to live as the Saviour and Lord.¹⁵

1.1 THE EARLY LIFE OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

This sub-heading seeks to explore the various stages of Jesus’ life. Here, effort would be made to expose the various formative years of Jesus which will enable us to have absolute access into the world in which Jesus lived and worked. We shall address here a holistic

¹² G. SCHNEIDER, “*Iesous Iesús*” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider, (ed), Vol. II, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 1991, 181.

¹³ E.P. SANDERS, “*Jesus Christ*” in *Dictionary of the Bible*, David Noel Freedman, (ed), Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapid, MI, 2001, 701.

¹⁴ Cf. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Jesus De Nazaré: Quem És Tu?* Editorial Franciscana, Braga, 1980, 5

¹⁵ Cf. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Jesus De Nazaré*, 6.

view of the life of Jesus with reference to what scholars said about him and my own contribution.

To embark on a research on any individual, courtesy demands that we take into consideration all that concerns such individual. As a matter of fact, Jesus who lived and worked during his lifetime here on earth, accomplished a lot. In talking about the history of Jesus, we need to put into consideration some fundamental points that will enable us gain access to the life history of Jesus. These fundamental points include the date of his birth, the census and the star that directed the wise men when Jesus was born.¹⁶ As such, we shall proceed to the Scripture to be clarified on this issue:

“Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world. This census – the first – took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. So, Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judea, to David’s town called Bethlehem, since he was of David’s house and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room in the living-space.”¹⁷

This passage gives us basic information about the particular period when Jesus was born and all the mysteries that surrounded his birth. When we talk about the life history of Jesus, the above passage is an appropriate biblical passage that helps us to have ample information about the historical Jesus, how he lived his life and all the ordeals he went through. We shall now give a chronological history of Jesus.

Jesus was born in the time of Emperor Augustus (37 aC.14dC), probably in Nazareth. We are not quite certain of the date of his birth. However, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke affirm that Jesus was born during the time of Herod Magnus before the Spring of 4 a.C. According to scholars, this position is probable but controversial. The doubt in the above chronology was however, justified by the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.¹⁸ But even at that we are not quite certain because according to Traugott Holtz in the *Encyclopaedia of Christianity*, “the year of Jesus’ birth is not known for certain, he was about 30 years

¹⁶ Cf. H. SCHWARZ, *Christology*, WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, U.S.A., 1998, 77.

¹⁷ Lk. 2, 1-7.

¹⁸ Cf. THEISSEN Gerd, Annette Merz, *O Jesus Histórico*, Edições Loyola, São Paulo, Brasil, 2002, 175.

when he began his ministry.”¹⁹ According to E.P. Sanders in the *Dictionary of the Bible*, Jesus “was born shortly before the death of Herod the great which was in 4 B.C.E.”²⁰ The point we are trying to make here is basically to establish without any iota of doubt the particular time Jesus was born but the result we have seen so far does not offer us absolute assurance of what we are out to search. Since we cannot establish with certainty when Jesus was born, Ben F. Meyer has this to say:

“Jesus of Nazareth entered upon his public career in the last quarter of a long period of the decline in Jewish fortunes, that is, from the triumph of the Maccabees when public plebiscite endorses the pretensions to the high priesthood on the part of Simon and his sons (14 B.c) to the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple under Titus (A.D. 70)”.²¹

As evident from the above, we are not too sure of the particular period Jesus was born but that will not limit us in our investigation. The testimonies of the historical sources about the origin of Jesus is unanimous. The writings of the New Testament attested to the fact that Jesus was born in Nazareth. Nazareth was presented as Jesus’ city and land of birth where all his family members lived. Even the multitude that followed Jesus in his triumphant entry into Jerusalem few days before his passion, attested to the fact Jesus is a prophet from Nazareth of Galilee. The testimonies we have seen so far is in consonant with the testimonies of many authors who defend the exclusive connection of Jesus with Galilee in Nazareth. Jesus was a Galilean, he spent most of his life in Galilee when he was about 30 years of age. However, the Gospels of Matthew and Luke establish some disparities between the place where Jesus was born and the origin of Jesus. Bethlehem of Judea was considered as the place where Jesus was born, and Nazareth was a place where he grew up and spent his infancy. These Gospels explain that Galilee in Nazareth was considered as a place where Jesus was formed and while his birth took place in Bethlehem of Judea.²² The above statement can be further backed up with biblical evidence: “After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of King Herod, suddenly some wise men came to Jerusalem asking, where is the infant king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage” (Matt 2,1-2). While in the Gospel

¹⁹ TRAUGOTT Holtz, “Jesus” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Erwin Fahlbusch (...et al), (ed), VOL. III. Wm. Eerdmans Publishing company, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003, 25.

²⁰ E.P. SANDERS, “Jesus Christ” in *Dictionary of the Bible*, 701.

²¹ BEN F. Meyer “Jesus Christ” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Noel Freedman (ed), Vol. III, Published by Doubleday, New York, and London, 1992, 777.

²² Cf. A. PUIG, Jesus: *Uma Biografia*, (3rd ed), Paulus Editora, Lisboa, 2006, 150.

of Luke we have the following biblical testimony: “He came to Nazara where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath as he usually did” (Lk 4,16).

The biblical passages we have seen above clearly demonstrate the basic information about Jesus. However, critical minds may think that some of the information presented in the Gospels are contradictory because of the two towns that were mentioned with respect to the original place where Jesus was born and brought up. But these two biblical passages rather help to clarify some of these doubts.

These two reports from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke about the infancy of Jesus have things in common. But there are some levels of distinctions. And these two levels of distinctions can be seen in the legal situation of Joseph and Mary at the moment of the birth of Jesus. In the Gospel of Matthew, the birth of Jesus is exclusively connected to Bethlehem, however, the appearance of the Angel to Mary occurs in an indeterminate place. Since the beginning of the Gospel, Bethlehem is the only house where the Magi from East met Mary and her son Jesus. This house as a matter of fact belongs to Joseph, descendant of David and member of the great family of the king of Israel. Matthew also presents in his narration that King Herod approved the killing of all the children of Bethlehem. This narration points to the fact that the visit of the Magi occurs sometimes after the birth of Jesus. He equally narrates that, after the Magi left the scene, the persecution of king Herod began. In the face of this persecution, Joseph, Mary and Jesus left for Egypt in the night.²³

The Gospel of Luke is silent about this in his narration. According to Luke, Mary lived in Nazareth. It was in this place she received the visit of Angel Gabriel. With regards to Joseph, we were not told exactly where he lived, however, according to the report of Luke, Joseph was obliged to go and register in Bethlehem of Judea. For this reason, he had to travel from Nazareth in Galilee to go and register in the land of his birth. In the light of this, it was recorded that after the birth of Jesus Joseph left Judea to Nazareth. From the above, it is very clear that Joseph and Mary came back to Nazareth their town in Galilee. Thus, it appears that Joseph came from two cities: Bethlehem and Nazareth. However, Joseph never had any house in Bethlehem. It was a family that accommodated him. In the report of Luke, Mary gave birth to her son Jesus in a manger.²⁴

²³ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 150-151.

²⁴ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 151.

Consequently, Jesus was circumcised on the 8th day after his birth in conformity with the Mosaic Law, and it appears that this event of circumcision took place at Bethlehem. Forty days after the birth of Jesus, they went to the temple in Jerusalem to fulfil the rites of purification of his mother, Mary, in accordance with the Jewish Law. Therefore, after that activity of purification in the temple they never returned to Bethlehem, they went back to Galilee their city in Nazareth.²⁵

There is no doubt that we have learnt something from the chronology of the history of Jesus as presented above. You would agree with me that apart from the chronology of the life history of Jesus we have seen above, there are so many other vital information and interpretation about the birth of Jesus that were not included in the chronology. This stems from the fact that some of the information we were given from the Scriptures are contradictory. When we carefully study the Scriptures, we will discover that each of the Evangelists presents the history of Jesus from their own perspective. In essence, no uniformity. Again, when we equally examine some of the narratives coming from some scholars we discover the same thing. There is no consensus in their presentation of the life of Jesus.

In the final analysis, the point we want to establish in this sub-heading is that, “the earthly origin of Jesus, be it Nazareth or Bethlehem is not of ultimate importance. Jesus comes directly from above, from heaven, from the Father, while others are fixated on the below, the flesh of this world.”²⁶ By the above statement we are not in any way relegating to the background the origin of Jesus, but we want to draw your attention to an important fact which John in his Gospel underlines when he wrote: “you are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world” (Jn. 8,23). However, considering the affirmation in the Gospel of John (Jn. 7,42), we can now conclude that Jesus came from Bethlehem. This is because the above biblical quotation from the Gospel of John gives or proves the traditional interpretation of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. The manner Matthew and Luke reconcile the predominant tradition of Nazareth with the tradition of Bethlehem in their narration of the infancy of Jesus offer us the opportunity

²⁵ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 151.

²⁶ J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. I, Doubleday Dell Publishing Company, New York, 1991, 215.

to interpret the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem not as a historical fact, but as a theological affirmation expressed in the form of a historical report.²⁷

We are quite enriched with the chronology we have seen above about the life of Jesus. This chronology has contributed immensely to our knowledge about Jesus, it has widened our horizon about this great figure of history. However, our reflection about the figure of Jesus would not be limited to this chronology. There are still many things that we need to know about Jesus which the next paragraph will explore.

We shall now proceed to our next reflection which has do with the lineage of Jesus. Biblical text and other materials affirm that Joseph is the legal father of Jesus from the descendant of David. Therefore, when we say Jesus is the son of Joseph it implies that Joseph is the legal father of Jesus, but not necessarily his biological father. Through the instrumentality of Joseph, Jesus became a descendant of David. Again, the affirmation that Jesus is the son of David or descendant of David is quite evident in the writings of the New Testament²⁸ as we can see below: “As Jesus went on his way two blind men followed him shouting, take pity on us son of David” (Matt 9,27). In the words of Schwarz Hans, “in both the Matthean account and Lukean genealogies (Matt 1 and Lk 2:4), we read that Joseph is of Davidic descent.”²⁹ The Gospel of Matthew confirms the above assertions: “Roll of the genealogy of Jesus Christ son of David, son of Abraham” (Matt 1,1).

After this brief but enriching exposition about the root of Jesus, we have no doubt that, so many ideas were learnt. Studying Jesus in connection to his background would enable us to have a holistic knowledge about him. After reflecting exhaustively about the life and identity of Jesus, we shall now proceed to another aspect of the life of Jesus.

²⁷ CF. J. P. MEIER, *Un Judío Marginal: Nueva vision Del Jesús Histórico*, Vol. I, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella, 1998, 229-230.

²⁸ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 168.

²⁹ H. SCHWARZ, *Christology*, 81.

1.2 HISTORICAL JESUS: FAMILY, ACADEMIC, BIRTH, AND SOCIAL WORLD

This sub-title seeks to present Jesus' family, his academic background and of course the environment that shaped all that concerns him. Our intention here is, basically to present the life history of Jesus in conformity to the family that brought him up and the people around who contributed immensely to his growth and development. The approach we shall adopt here is expository; that is, exposing the general perception of scholars about the formative years of Jesus. Our intention here is not to be critical in our presentation, but we shall dwell more on what scholars say about this great figure of history. Reference will be made to a great scholar, Maurice Casey, whose contribution with respect to the family of Jesus is of great importance. Emphasising the indispensable nature of family in the time of Jesus, Maurice Casey has this to say:

“Jesus was born in Israel, into an observant Jewish family. Jesus' family in Nazareth are also known up to a point. His father was Joseph, called after a major patriarch who ruled over Egypt under Pharaoh. Jesus' mother was Miriam, whom we call Mary, so she was called after Moses' sister. Joseph and Miriam called Jesus after the major figure of Jewish history who succeeded Moses and led Israel across the Jordan into the promised land.”³⁰

This brief exposition unfolds to us some information about the family of Jesus. The word “family” in every society occupies a central position. In the days of Jesus, the importance of family was highly stressed to the point that one becomes a recognisable person in the society when he or she belongs to a family. Family becomes very important because it guarantees the security of a person. It is through the instrumentality of the family that one becomes aware of his personality.³¹ From the above, it is very clear that Jesus was born and nurtured in a society where value was attached to someone's family. In our practical society too, family is highly indispensable and occupies a very crucial position. One who has no family is despised among his or her equals. This clearly demonstrates how vital family is in our lives as human beings. The same situation is applicable during the days of Jesus.

It is in the light of the above we wish to affirm that Jesus like any other human being belongs to a family. It is because of this that the information we have about Jesus presents

³⁰ M. CASEY, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 143.

³¹ Cf. J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol. I, 316-317.

him as the son of Joseph the carpenter and son of Mary. In the Acts of the Apostles, Mary is also presented as the mother of Jesus (Acts 1,14). However, the designation of Mary as the mother of Jesus does not appear in the Gospel of John because of the internal reason of the author of this Gospel. Apart from the Gospel of John, the designation of Mary as the mother of Jesus appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This does not imply that Mary is forgotten in the Gospel of John. There are several occasions where she is mentioned but as the usual style of St. John, she is always referred to as “woman” like in the wedding feast at Canaan and at the foot of the cross.³²

As we have seen above, Jesus truly belongs to a family and there are various sources that testify to this fact. However, the old Christian and Jewish sources talked about the brothers and sisters of Jesus. The brothers of Jesus go by the classical names of the family of Israel. James who is the eldest among the brothers of Jesus goes by the name Jacob, Judah, Joseph and Simeon. Jesus equally has sisters, but their names were not mentioned in the Canonical Gospels. The brothers of Jesus formed a group that was different from the normal group of his disciples, who shared the life and mission of Jesus. When we talk about the brothers and sisters of Jesus what do we mean? This was interpreted in four ways. The first interpretation is that we are referring to the biological and legal brothers of Jesus. The second interpretation presents the brothers of Jesus as his direct cousins. The third interpretation refers to them as his half brothers and sisters, and, Joseph happened to be their legal father. The fourth and final interpretation refers to them as the half brothers and sisters of Jesus, and Mary is their biological and legal mother, but Joseph happened to be the legal father of Jesus and not biological father. In the final analysis, the expression brothers of Jesus refer to the cousins of Jesus.³³

The point we have highlighted above is one of the controversial point among scholars. Having said that, we shall now proceed to another important point in our reflection that has to do with the educational background of Jesus. Our intention in this paragraph is to investigate if Jesus had some level of enlightenment during his messianic activities here on earth.

As a matter of fact, if Jesus was born and brought up in an academic environment like Rome or in Jerusalem, it would be very simple for us to ascertain his academic

³² Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 162.

³³ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 172-182.

background and the level of knowledge he acquired. However, Jesus was born in Nazareth a place that had no great significance. If Jesus was born in this type of environment it would be very difficult to believe the credibility of the formal education, he received. It is very clear that Jesus had a great capacity of teaching and instructing people like one who is highly educated, but the question remains could Jesus read and write? Was Jesus a literate? There are three biblical passages that prove that Jesus could read and write.³⁴

The first of these biblical passages that attest to the above assertion is the gospel of St. John (Jn. 8,6), that relates the story of a woman who was caught in an act of adultery. This very passage appears in the manuscript of the Gospel of Luke. However, this passage was not commented by any Greek biblical scholar during the first millennium. It was considered by some experts as a creation of the Church of the second century that stresses the question of compassion that sinners deserve. An explanation was not given with certainty while Jesus inclined his head to write when the Pharisees questioned him about the penalty of this woman caught in the very act of adultery. Again, the fact that Jesus inclined his head and was writing when he was interrogated does not portrays Jesus' ability or capacity to read and write.³⁵

In continuation of the above, another biblical passage that proves that Jesus was educated is the Gospel of John 7,15. This passage does not in any way affirm that Jesus was educated. It rather points out that Jesus' knowledge of the Scriptures presents him as one who is educated. Jesus never received any formal education from any Rabbi, however, he was an expert in the use of the Scriptures.³⁶ In connection to the above, Armand Puig affirms that, the fact that Jesus was called a Rabbi shows that he possessed a high level of knowledge of the Scriptures that enables him to discuss and dialogue with people, and his capacity to interpret the Law just like the Rabbis of his time.³⁷ Another example that was given about the academic or educational background of Jesus is graphically explained by the following biblical passage:

“He came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written: “The Spirit

³⁴ Cf. J. P. MEIER, *Un Judío Marginal*, Vol. 1, 279-280.

³⁵ Cf. J. P. MEIER, *Un Judío Marginal*, vol. 1, 280.

³⁶ Cf. J. P. MEIER, *Un Judío Marginal*, vol.1, 281.

³⁷ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 199.

of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord” (Lk 4, 16-19).

In view of the biblical passage, John. p. Meier reawakens our consciousness to the very fact that, “if only we could take Luke 4,16-30 as a faithful report of a historical event, we would have unquestionable proof of Jesus’ ability to read and expound the Hebrew Scriptures.”³⁸ The responses we have gotten so far from our research about the academic background of Jesus does not seem satisfactory because some scholars were of the opinion that the chronology or the report of the Gospel of Luke with regard to the educational background of Jesus is questionable. Again, the authenticity of the account of Luke about Jesus’ proficiency in reading when he was handed the scroll to read in the synagogue, is in doubt because Jesus’ capacity to read does not belong to the original narrative.³⁹

However, further testimonies prove Jesus’ educational background as we shall soon see. Jesus was born in a small town of Nazareth in the Jewish family where the religion of Moses was highly practiced. Family and synagogue were the two environments where Jesus had his formation. But it is very difficult to ascertain the type of education Jesus received in the Davidic family. There are few indications during the time of Jesus with regards to the system of education in Judaism, but during this period, the synagogue occupied a central position in the education of children until 12 years of age, where children were obliged to fulfil the Law. It was because of this that many children before reaching the legal age learnt how to keep the Law, especially children who were born in a religious family. These children at this very age were taught by their parents to recite by heart Prayers, keeping the Sabbath, the Law of ritual cleansing, fasting on the day of Expiation, and finally these children were taught by their parents the history of great and renowned figures in Israel. Jesus was equally born into this very society and as such, between the age of 6 and 12, he learnt to memorise Scriptural passages. He was equally capable just like the children of his time to read. The acquaintances of Jesus with the Jewish Scriptures began through the help of his parents Joseph and Mary where he was officially initiated into the memorisation and study of the Jewish Scriptures in the synagogue of his town, where he probably learnt how to read and write along with other

³⁸ J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew*, vol.1, 270.

³⁹ Cf. J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew*, vol.1, 270.

Nazarene children. Therefore, the acquaintances of Jesus with the Scriptures continued during the rest of his stay in Nazareth.⁴⁰

The data we have gathered so far implies to very large extent that Jesus possessed some level of enlightenment when he was on earth. But from what we have seen so far, we were not given a convincing assurance of the institution Jesus was enrolled into. However, from the information we have gathered it implies Jesus had some level of enlightenment. Having said this, we shall now proceed to another important aspect of this research in this sub-heading, this concerns the language Jesus spoke.

Before we venture into this reflection, it is highly necessary to know if Jesus while on earth spoke any language and if he did, then what type of language? What do we know about the language Jesus spoke? Our responses to the foregoing question raised by Arnaldo Pinho is that, did Jesus speak the language his listeners understood and what is the name of this language? Responses to the above question are diverse. For some, Jesus spoke Greek just like any other individual of the demitarian after the Hellenization. The New Testament was written in this very language. Others state that the language in Palestine during the time of Jesus was Latin and this language was only spoken by the Roman occupants. Greek was considered as the main language just like the way we have English language and was very common during the period of Hellenization in the Oriental Demitarians. The rest of the languages such as Hebrew and Aramaic were considered as the language of the ancestors, but they went into extinction.⁴¹

Jesus as we know never spoke Latin that was considered as the language that was prevalent in this period and in his region. In relation to the question of Hebrew, Jesus learnt Hebrew in the synagogue. As a Rabbi, Jesus spoke the language his listeners and contemporaries understood.⁴² Therefore, Jesus in the words of Maurice Casey “was brought up speaking Aramaic, as all his family did. Aramaic was the main language used in the Galilean countryside.”⁴³ In view of this, it was the only language Jesus utilised to make known to the people the message about the kingdom of his Father. The writings of the New Testament attested to the fact that, this was the only language Jesus utilised to

⁴⁰ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 192-195.

⁴¹ Cf. A. PINHO, *Jesus Cristo: Quem É*, Universidade Católica Editora, Palma de Cima, Lisboa, 2003, 31-32.

⁴² Cf. A. PINHO, *Jesus Cristo*, 32.

⁴³ M. CASEY, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 158.

convey the message about the reign of his Father. Later, the New Testament was translated into Greek to facilitate the clear understanding of Jesus' messianic messages.⁴⁴

In the final analysis, we can confidently affirm without any iota of doubt that we have assimilated a lot of information about the person of Jesus. This reflection has taken us into the world of the historical Jesus and all he did while on earth. The information acquired so far are very vital and they offer us at least a vivid data about Jesus. In this reflection we came across certain contradictions about certain assertions about Jesus. We consider some of these contradictions necessary because they enable us to know with all sincerity some affirmations about Jesus that are true and the ones that are false. In the face of some these contradictory affirmations about the person of Jesus, authentic and sincere information were unfolded.

1.3 THE HISTORICAL JESUS: THE JEWISH ORIGIN

The relevance of the Jewish origin of Jesus cannot be over-emphasised as far as this reflection is concern. It is in this Jewish environment that the basic data about the life of Jesus becomes accessible to us. Sources from the Jewish environment are highly indispensable in this very research because Jesus spent most of his life in this very environment. This implies that any information we acquire from this Jewish environment, its usefulness cannot be over-emphasised because it is coming from the right source. It is based upon the aforestated assertion that this very sub-title seeks to explore the life of Jesus with consideration to the Jewish environment where great part of his life was spent.

Therefore, we shall begin our reflection here by joining our voice with that of Thomas P. Rausch who states that "the third quest scholarship has expanded our capacity to construct a picture of the historical Jesus considerably by focusing on the social context of his world, first century Palestinian Judaism in general and in the land of Galilee."⁴⁵ Therefore, a critical research into the life and mission of Jesus can only be understood vividly if we try as much as possible to situate him within the Jewish environment that greatly influenced his way of life.⁴⁶ A genuine research about Jesus must take into

⁴⁴ Cf. M. CASEY, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 158.

⁴⁵ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 41.

⁴⁶ Cf. T. P. RAUSCH, *Who Is Jesus?* 41.

consideration the relevance of the environment that moulded him. Stating the importance of the Jewish origin of Jesus, Marcus J. Borg in the *Anchor Dictionary of the Bible* states categorically that:

“Because of the mostly tragic history of Jewish-Christian relations, in which Jesus and the Jews have often been portrayed as bitter enemies, it is necessary at the outset to speak of the Jewishness of Jesus. This refers, first to the obvious fact that Jesus’ origins were Jewish. He was born a Jew, socialized as a Jew, and remained Jewish all his life. To be sure he was not unaffected by other traditions.”⁴⁷

When we claim that Jesus is a Jew we are not only talking about where he originated from. The point we are trying to make is that all that concerns Jesus is intimately connected to Judaism. When we carefully study the Bible, we discover that there are some points of convergence in the proclamation of Jesus and the values the Jewish people so much held in high esteem. Jesus while on earth advocated for the radical change of heart of the Jewish people. Jesus never advocated for the establishment of a great movement. He was concerned with the conversion of the Jewish people. In trying to realise this dream of his, Jesus suddenly became the enemy of the Jewish leaders.⁴⁸ In the same line, Marcus J. Borg clearly puts that “the conflict between Jesus and some of his contemporaries was an intra-Jewish dispute, analogous to the tension between Jeremiah and his contemporaries in the 6th century B.C.E.”⁴⁹

From the above assertion, it clear that Jesus is a Jew. But the question that continues to border the minds of critical thinkers is that, “how do we establish the Jewishness of Jesus?” Why do we call him a Jew? These and many other questions will be addressed in this sub-heading. For us to answer some of these questions, courtesy demands that we look at the traditions of the Jewish people in the days of Jesus, the context in which Jesus lived and the context that proved he was a Jew.

It is a fact that the Jews in the days of Jesus were known for their religiosity and their reactions toward anything that concerns religion. The first of these is that, the Jews took the worship of one true God and discouraged the service of other divinities other than the one true God. They were acquainted with the culture of adoring God in the temple within

⁴⁷ MARCUS J. Borg, “*The Teaching of Jesus Christ*” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 806.

⁴⁸ Cf. MARCUS J. Borg, “*The Teaching of Jesus Christ*” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. III, 806.

⁴⁹ MARCUS J. Borg, “*The Teaching of Jesus Christ*” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. III, 806.

a stipulated period during the year. They consistently pay their dues as the Jewish costume demands, to contribute immensely to the welfare of other Jewish families who are in need of help. They have a strong respect for prayer to the point that, every Jew recites every day the book of the law. They observed strictly the holy days of obligations without getting themselves engaged in hard labour. Again, they gave importance to the issue of bodily cleanliness before going for prayers to get themselves rid of all that can render their prayers ineffective. These regulations set the Jewish people from another human race. This does not imply that the Jewish people are better off than other human races. However, we should be aware that each human person just like the Jews have their own rules and regulations.⁵⁰

Another place that is given a great respect among the Jewish people is the temple. The temple for them is a place where sacrifices are offered, and feast are celebrated daily. Before the rising of the sun in the morning, the Jews offer their morning sacrifice. In the afternoon they begin preparations for the celebration of the evening sacrifice. During this time, the place of worship was in the temple at Jerusalem where people gather every Saturday to spend their day of rest in prayers and supplications, listening of the word of God. The preachers who preach during this period of encounter at the synagogue had an influence on the mentality and the conscience of the people. This celebration does not only take place at the synagogue, it also continues in families. At the vespers of every Saturday when the beginning of this celebration is announced, lights are put on and every Jew get rid of their casual wears and get themselves dressed properly for the celebration. For an effective celebration, manual labour and other strenuous activities are prohibited.⁵¹

However, most of these rules and regulations of the Jewish people adopt another extreme measure that affected the wellbeing of a larger number of the Jews. The above statement can be very evident in the subjugation women went through in the Jewish world in the time of Jesus. For instance, in the days of Jesus Jewish women are prohibited from mixing up or interacting with people during their monthly period. Again, women were not allowed to divorce their husbands, while men were given license to do so. Women were strictly prevented from taking part in governance, stating that the functions of women are

⁵⁰ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, Published by the Penguin Group, London, 1993, 35-36.

⁵¹ Cf. J. GNILKA, *Jesus De Nazaré*, Editorial Presença, Lisboa, 1999, 53-54.

basically to take care of domestic activities at home. During this period, there was high rate of oppression.⁵²

These Jewish regulations created a gap between the well to do individuals and the less privileged in the society. This situation was so alarming that the less privileged could not afford to take proper care of themselves. Jesus looking at this situation, began to re-establish and put to place so many things that were out of place.⁵³ Observing very closely the situation, surveying critically the suffering and subjugation his people were going through, he adopted a means of eradicating this situation by confronting these laid down regulations that deprived his people of their freedom and joy. The first thing Jesus did to control the situation, would be discussed below.

For Jesus to teach the Jewish people the due process they needed to know in the worship of God, he began by establishing a change to their rules and regulations. E. P. Sanders describes the attitude of Jesus towards the Jews in connection to their rules and regulations as follows:

“The law with its precepts could have become for men the occasion for recognizing the absolute will of God. But men have defrauded themselves of this opportunity by their expansion of the precepts into a legal system. As a result, Jesus was now obliged to announce what must be obtain in the Kingdom of God, that is, the pure will of God. He spoke like one who possessed authority and power, and not like other Scribes, but in the eyes of the Jews that could only be view as heresy.”⁵⁴

With this solemn declaration, Jesus becomes a subject of discussion among the Jewish leading figures. Jesus became their enemy because he challenged their attachment of importance to things that are not considered necessary and pointing to them what is relevant that would enable them to inherit the kingdom of God. With this expression, Jesus renders useless the laid down ordinances of the Jewish people and put to an end their excessive obsession to following the laid down regulations of their religion.⁵⁵ In one occasion, Jesus radically challenged the Jewish Law evident in the following biblical passage:

⁵² Cf. T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 56.

⁵³ Cf. T.P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 57.

⁵⁴ E.P. SANDERS, *Jesus and Judaism*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1985, 33.

⁵⁵ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *Jesus and Judaism*, 33.

“It happened that one Sabbath he was walking through the cornfields, and his disciples were picking ears of corn, rubbing them in their hands and eating them. Some of the Pharisees said, why are you doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath day? Jesus answered them, “so you have not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry, how he went into the house of God and took the loaves of the offering and ate them and gave them to his followers, loaves which the Priests alone are allowed to eat?” And he said to them, “the Son of man is master of the Sabbath” (Lk 1-6).

By this passage, it is crystal clear that the Jews give so much attention to the observance of laws. Their life and piety find expression in the strict observance of the Law. For them, keeping to the Law is the beginning of a happy living. All other virtues are summarised under it. It is through the observance of the Law that the people of Israel were able to gain control over evil.⁵⁶ This is the society Jesus was born and brought up. In the words of Thomas Rausch, “Jesus can only be understood in the light of the religious traditions of which he was part of.”⁵⁷ This is the only way that tells us about the Jewish roots of Jesus. Jesus is a Jew, but a Jew with distinction. It is based on the above assertion that Schurer Emil in his book “*The History of the Jewish People in the time of Jesus Christ*”, writes: “no incident in the Gospel story, no word in the preaching of Jesus Christ, is intelligible apart from the setting in the Jewish history, and without a clear understanding of that world of thought-distinction of the Jewish people.”⁵⁸ The above citation, reminded us of the fact that Jesus is a Jew. Schuere is not the only figure who thought of Jesus in that manner. There are several authors who thought of Jesus in this manner. One of these authors is Lars Kierpsel, in his reflection about the figure of Jesus affirms:

“Probably the most philo-Semitic statements of the whole New Testament are found in the Gospel of John. Jesus is not merely a supernatural divine figure, but the Samaritan woman calls him a Jew, and Pilate recognizes him as such as well. The presentation of Jesus going up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jew indirectly testifies to his Jewishness.”⁵⁹

There are many instances in the bible where the Jewish root of Jesus was proved. One of the occasion where Jesus was considered a Jew was during his final encounter with Pilate. In one of these encounters, Pilate puts the following question: “are you the king of the

⁵⁶ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 83.

⁵⁷ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* P. 60.

⁵⁸ E. SCHURER, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, Vol.1. Hendrickson Publisher Inc. edition, Massachusetts, U.S.A., 2003, 1.

⁵⁹ L. KIERSPEL, *The Jew and the World in the Fourth Gospel*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen, 2006, 63-64.

Jews?” (Jn. 18,33). There are other places in the Scripture where Jesus is presented as a Jew. For instance: “the Samaritan woman said to him, you a Jew. How is it that you ask me, a Samaritan, for something to drink? Jews, of course, do not associate with Samaritans” (Jn. 4, 9).⁶⁰

Jesus, as we all know is a Jew, he was born and brought up in a Jewish environment. Jesus is a Jew who lived in or among the Palestinian Jews who were directly or indirectly controlled by the Romans. Jesus made himself intentionally a marginal Jew before the eyes of the normal Palestinian Jew. This is because some of the teachings and practices of Jesus especially on divorce, voluntary celibacy, was considered marginal in the sense that his teachings did not conform or tally with the practices of the principal groups of the Jews of his time. Jesus’ style of teaching and his way of life was offensive in the eyes of the Jews of his time. When we refer to Jesus here as marginal Jew, what do we intend to put across? In the modern sociological studies, the word marginal refers to poor people, people from a rural culture that migrated to the city but find it difficult to integrate in the culture of the city. Jesus too could be marginal in a similar sense. Jesus who was poor, a prophet and master, a religious figure from a rural Galilean environment, came across his death in Jerusalem due to the misunderstanding he had with an urban aristocratic priest.⁶¹

For these groups of Jewish people, a poor man from the rural Galilean city with very strange and disturbing doctrines is considered marginal. Marginal in the sense that, Jesus’ teachings and way of life stood against the established Jewish power and authority. However, John. p. Meier ends his reflection by affirming that, Jesus’ way of life, his teachings, does not in any way qualify him with the designation “marginal”, rather offer us further opportunity to explore the meaning of the term marginal.⁶² In the final analysis, Jesus is a Jew, but the distinction between Jesus and other Jews is that, Jesus was bent in following the due process which the Jews would not want to follow. In this process, Jesus became the enemy of the Jews because he applied a very radical approach to his way of doing things for instance:

“when the Jewish Passover was near Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the temple, he found people selling cattle and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting there.

⁶⁰ Cf. L. KIERSPEL, *The Jews and the Word in the Fourth Gospel*, 64.

⁶¹ Cf. J. P. MEIER, *Un Judío Marginal*, vol.1, 36-37.

⁶² Cf. J. P. MEIER, *Un Judío Marginal*, Vol.1, 37.

Making a whip out of cord, he drove all out of the Temple, sheep and cattle as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over" (Jn. 2, 11-15).

The above attitude or radicality of Jesus, raised a lot of doubts among the Jews about the personality of Jesus. But the truth remains that Jesus did that to "purify the temple so that it should better fulfil its purpose".⁶³ In the final analysis, it is on the basis of the above contextualisation that we would be able to understand the Jewish root of Jesus. Anything outside this, presents false identity of Jesus to us.

1.4 THE IMPACTS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST ON THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Another figure that will enable us to know more about Jesus is John the Baptist. History puts it clearly that John the Baptist developed a very close relationship with Jesus when he was on earth. It is based on this relationship that this sub-heading seeks to study the life of Jesus through the instrumentality of John the Baptist. Here effort will be made to evaluate the role of John the Baptist to the emergence of the mission of Jesus here on earth.

It is based on the foregoing that we will like to begin our reflection here by quoting the words of E.P. Sanders in the *Dictionary of the Bible* about Jesus. "Jesus' public career began when he was baptized by John the Baptist, an eschatological prophet who proclaimed that the day of judgment was at hand. Jesus seems to have accepted this."⁶⁴ The above affirmation testifies to the fact that the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist has a lot of reliable information to offer us with regards to the research about the life history of Jesus. The above statement about John the Baptist and Jesus can be further justified by the above biblical passage: "it was at this time that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John" (Mk1,9.10). As we can see from the above Scriptural passage, Jesus began his salvific mission on earth when John the Baptist officially commissioned him at Jordan. Apart from the above biblical testimony about Jesus and John the Baptist, we have another testimony that clearly

⁶³ E. P. SANDERS, *Jesus and Judaism*, 61.

⁶⁴ E.P. SANDERS, "Jesus Christ" in *Dictionary of the Bible*, 703.

portrays the proximity of John the Baptist with Jesus, evident in the writings of the New Testament as we can see below:

“The disciples of John gave him all this news, and John, summoning two of his disciples, sent them to the Lord to ask, “are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect someone else”? When the men reached Jesus they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to ask, “are you the one who is to come or are we to expect someone else?” Then he gave the messengers their answer, go back and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind sees again, the lame walk, those suffering from virulent skin diseases are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the good news is proclaimed to the poor” (Lk 7,18-22).

The above biblical passage showcases that Jesus and John the Baptist are closely related. This implies that John was actively present during Jesus’ salvific mission here on earth. With this, we can conclude that the most important information that we can ever have about the figure of Jesus is to study the life of John the Baptist and his role during the mission of Jesus on earth. John the Baptist presented the figure of Jesus and his mission to the world, when he said: “... look, there is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. It was of him that I said, behind me comes one who has passed ahead of me because he existed before me” (Jn. 1, 29-30). With this proclamation, John the Baptist presented the person of Jesus as well as his salvific mission to all creation.

The significance of John the Baptist cannot be over-emphasised as far as Jesus’ mission is concerned. John the Baptist revealed the incarnated son of God to humanity and that is why the mission of John the Baptist is highly indispensable in our desire to gather vital and authentic data about Jesus. Commenting on the relevance of John the Baptist with respect to the research about Jesus, Thomas Rausch writes that: “Jesus’ baptism at the hands of John changed his life. While we cannot read too much psychological meaning into the story of his baptism, the encounter must have been very significant.”⁶⁵ This experience of Jesus with John the Baptist modified his (Jesus) life radically and offered him the opportunity of becoming a great and renowned proclaimer of the living Word of his Father. ⁶⁶

⁶⁵ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who Is Jesus?* 65.

⁶⁶ Cf. T. P. RAUSCH, *Who Is Jesus?* 65.

The relevance of the mission of John the Baptist cannot be relegated to the background as far as this research work is concerned. When we lose sight of John's contribution in our quest to obtain crucial data about the person of Jesus, the authenticity of our research would be doubted. It is in the light of this, that "Jesus himself continued to speak of John with great respect. According to the Q tradition, Jesus declares John greater than any born of woman."⁶⁷ To further justify this assertion, we shall go back to the Scriptures to see the testimonies Jesus himself bore about John the Baptist:

"In truth I tell you, of all the children born to women, there has never been anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. Since John the Baptist came, up to this present time, the kingdom of Heaven has been subjected to violence and the violent are taking it by storm. Because it was towards John that all the prophecies of the prophets and of the law were leading; and he, if you will believe me, is the Elijah who was to return" (Matt 11, 11-14).

The above biblical text, clearly portrays the centrality of John the Baptist in the mission of Jesus. Therefore, knowing the world of Jesus to a very large extent implies knowing or having a holistic knowledge about John the Baptist too. John the Baptist as a matter of fact received a special task from God which is the task of making known to the people who Jesus was. Therefore, John "played a role that affected not just the first disciples of Jesus but Jesus himself as well."⁶⁸

John the Baptist decides the destiny of Jesus through the baptism he conferred on him and the violent death of John the Baptist was considered by Jesus as a sign that was given by God to begin his mission. The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist is a constituent act in the existence of Jesus. The baptism and the unction of the Holy Spirit give rise to the messianic qualification of the man Jesus. The baptism and the unction of the Holy Spirit qualify the humanity of Jesus for the mission his Father entrusted to him. It was the encounter of Jesus with John the Baptist that brought Jesus into the spotlight. We all know that the baptism which John the Baptist was administering was part of the moral ritual for the conversion of hearts. His baptism is something new that insists on forgiveness and the salvation of God. Jesus became united with this movement and became baptised by him.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who Is Jesus?* 67.

⁶⁸ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who Is Jesus?* 67.

⁶⁹ Cf. O. GONZÁLEZ DE CARDEAL, *Cristología*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 2012, 39-40.

One of the most interesting things about John the Baptist is that, during his mission he never on any occasion claimed to be the Messiah who was to come. He never portrayed himself as the Christ but rather he was quite content with his position of making known Jesus to the people. John the Baptist was neither scared to present himself as the Christ nor as the one chosen by God for the restoration of the hope of the people of God. He was focused on being the mouth piece of God, one entrusted with the function of preparing people for the reign of God.⁷⁰ It is based on this affirmation, “we can now see what attracted Jesus to John. John exercised a large scale and highly successful prophetic ministry of repentance to Israel. He called upon the whole Israel to return to the Lord, and he backed this with ethical teaching.”⁷¹ The above relation that existed between John the Baptist and Jesus made some scholars to affirm that Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist. Some affirm that, those who were disciples of Jesus had also been the disciples of John. Personalities like Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, and so on.⁷² To justify the above assertion that Jesus had been the disciple of John the Baptist, references can be made to the Scriptures as below: “in the course of his preaching he said, after me is coming someone who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals” (Mk 1,7). In addition to the above biblical citation, John P. Meier in the second volume of his book “*A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the historical Jesus*”, joined his voice with the above affirmation:

“The question whether Jesus was a disciple of Baptist immediately generates a further question: what do you mean by disciple? The very fact that Jesus left Nazareth, came to the region of the Jordan to hear John and accepted his message to the point of receiving his baptism means that in a broad sense of the word, Jesus became John’s disciple. Besides being an eschatological prophet, and indeed because of that, John was also a spiritual master and guide who taught a particular ritual observance as a sign of beginning a new way of life.”⁷³

In continuation of the above passage, John. p. Meier continues with the claim that Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist in the very strict sense of the word. The reason of the above stems from the fact that after Jesus was baptised by John he became integrated into the followers of John at a particular period and helped him in his preaching and baptism

⁷⁰ Cf. M. CASEY, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 175-176.

⁷¹ M. CASEY, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 176.

⁷² Cf. J. GNILKA Joaquim, *Jesus De Nazaré*, 82.

⁷³ J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol.II, Published by Doubleday, New York, 1994, 116.

(Jn. 3,23-27). Therefore, the reason why Andrew and some of the disciples of Jesus got to know Jesus was through the instrumentality of John the Baptist. This is because Jesus just like the other disciples was baptised by their master John. Before the baptism, the figure of Jesus remained unknown to the disciples. The impact of John the Baptist in his message, baptism, is highly considered as the origin of the message and the praxis of Jesus.⁷⁴

In the final analysis, John the Baptist was the first prophetic figure known in the first century and he carried out his prophetic activities in the desert of Judea and in the Jordan region. John the Baptist was an eschatological figure who lived a life of austerity in the desert. He does not set distinction in his preaching. He preached for the rich and the poor, the just and the unjust. His figure was likened to the great prophets of Israel and many became attracted to him because of his way of life: people from all works of live paid him a visit in the desert where he ministered for the coming of the Lord. His sanctity attracted multitude to him. John was murdered by Antipas because of John's critique of the marriage between Antipas and Herodias.⁷⁵

Jesus of Nazareth who was baptised by John the Baptist, received or participated in the prophetic spirit of the one who baptised him. The preaching of John began with the announcement of the manifestation of the kingdom of God. This good news was however, opened to all but particularly the poor, the marginalised, the sick, the sinners, and those who need conversion. Jesus unlike John the Baptist carried out his messianic activities inside and outside Galilee and at times he visits Jerusalem. Unlike John, Jesus never lived in the desert, neither did he lived an ascetical life. However, he was not stationary, he moved from one place to the other particularly the Galilean region and he enticed a good number of followers who shared in his life and mission. His prophetic activities were accompanied with cures, exorcism and other extraordinary signs that attracted the attention of many.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Cf. J. P. MEIER, *Un Judío Marginal: Nueva Visión Del Jesús Histórico, Tomo I*, Editorial Verbo Divino, 2010, 159-167.

⁷⁵ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 125.

⁷⁶ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 125-127.

In summary, we can join our voice with that of John. p. Meier by affirming that, “Jesus being baptized by John is one of the most historically certain events ascertainable by any reconstruction of the historical Jesus. So strong was the impact of John on Jesus.”⁷⁷

As we have rightly pointed out right from the beginning of this reflection, the relevance of John in the mission of Jesus cannot be over-emphasised. His centrality in the mission of Jesus is highly indispensable. When we carefully study what we have presented so far, we will find out that John is truly the mouth piece of Jesus during his mission on earth. John the Baptist played a very vital role before the advent of Jesus and even during his active mission. In studying the life history of the historical Jesus sources from the life of John the Baptist are highly imperative. This is because “the way was prepared for Jesus by an apocalyptic-messianic movement led by John the Baptist, who in the thought of early Christians was the forerunner of the Messiah.”⁷⁸

1.5 THE GENERAL APPROACH TO THE PREACHING AND THE TEACHING MINISTRY OF JESUS

We have seen already the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, the importance and the centrality of John the Baptist in the mission of Jesus. In this sub-heading we are going to examine Jesus’ central message and the method he adopted in his preaching apostolate and how this method helped in the spread of the Gospel message. Therefore, our concern in here is to address the basic theme of Jesus’ preaching or teaching and its aftermath.

Our reflection about the historical Jesus will be incomplete without his preaching and teaching ministry. It is this preaching ministry of Jesus that gives us detailed information about him. But before we move further in our reflection, we shall make reference to a biblical passage that will enable us to have a glimpse of the preaching ministry of Jesus:

“You know what happened in all over Judea, how Jesus of Nazareth began in Galilee, after John had been preaching baptism. God has anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went about doing good and curing all

⁷⁷ J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol. II, 129.

⁷⁸ W. WALKER, (...et al), *A History of the Christian Church*, (4^{ed}), T & T Clark LTD, Edinburgh, 1986, 20.

who had fallen into the power of devil. And now we are witnesses to everything he did throughout the countryside of Judea and in Jerusalem itself: and they killed him by hanging him on a tree, yet on the third day God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen” (Acts 10, 37-40).

With the above declaration, Jesus began officially his ministry on earth. With this, Jesus introduced himself and his ministry to the world and of course many positive things were recorded as we saw in the above biblical passage. It was based on this that Jesus was addressed by the following names: “the healer, the exorcist, a prophet, the awaited Messiah, the Son of Man.”⁷⁹ The centrality of the proclamation of Jesus according to Walter Kasper was centred basically on the following:

“For the Baptist the approach of the Kingdom of God means a threatening judgement, but for Jesus the offer of salvation. Jesus’ preaching is not a message of fear, but of joy. For this reason, the synoptic Gospels often use the term good news. This phrase points to some essential features of Jesus’ preaching. The change Jesus made was to make the concept of the kingdom of God not just important but the central element in the concept of salvation. By the preaching of this kingdom he promised the fulfilment of all human hopes, expectations and longings for a fundamental transformation of the order of things and a completely new start.”⁸⁰

This text clearly demonstrates the centrality of the mission of Jesus to the world. From the passage it is evident that the basic concern of Jesus was to establish the reign of his Father here on earth, the reign that will bring about a positive modification in the lives of the people. The question we are being confronted with in this brief passage is basically the meaning of this Kingdom which Jesus came to this world to establish. Here effort will be made to critically analyse what this kingdom consists and its theological implication to this research.

The term Kingdom of God appears 163 times in the New Testament. This is very evident in the synoptic Gospels. The Kingdom of God is typically the expression of Christ. Jesus uses this language on several occasions to address his followers. In the New Testament the expression “the Kingdom of God” refers to God or Christ himself. In Greek this term assumes a functional signification, that is, sovereignty, monarchy, dignity, the office of a king, which all point to the geographical meaning of the Kingdom. In Hebrew, the concept

⁷⁹ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who Is Jesus?* 77.

⁸⁰ W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, Burns and Oates, Great Britain, 1976, 83.

“Kingdom” does not only denotes sovereignty but also kingdom. However, this term in German has no functional and geographical meaning.⁸¹ The kingdom of God according to U. Luz in the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* is basically “the radical and unlimited love of God, he calls each person to a life of love here and now. Indeed, because Jesus is concerned primarily with life lived here and now based on the coming kingdom.”⁸²

The above are not the only meanings and explanations of the Kingdom. When we move further we shall discover that, this Kingdom Jesus preached has another connotation all together. From my point of view, the Kingdom of God is basically Jesus in the midst of his people. Jesus having a communion with his people. The Kingdom of God can equally imply the dawn of the glory of God and the enthronement of the kingship of God on earth. The kingdom of God is basically a kingdom where equality and justice abide. Is a kingdom where the downtrodden are given a special place and attention. It is in the light of this that Martin Hengel writes: “Jesus’ kingship is in any case of a completely different quality. It has nothing to do with the kingdom of this world, completely ruled as they are by calculating political powers.”⁸³

In furtherance of the above, the kingdom of God is not something that can be ascertain through human effort and piety, the kingdom of God is a gift of God a heritage reserved for all who are ready to be part of this great and glorious kingdom. Even though we have rightly affirmed initially that the kingdom of God cannot be ascertain through human effort or piety, this does not mean we should not work towards the actualisation of this kingdom through our own little ways. The things we are supposed to do for the perfect actualisation and realisation of this kingdom is perseverance and believing in the word of God, conversion of heart and so on.⁸⁴ The kingdom of God in the words of Walter Kasper “means letting God act, letting God go into action, letting God be God, giving him glory, recognizing his rule. When people believe in this way, God’s rule becomes reality in the ordinary events of history.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ Cf. U. LUZ, “*Basileia Reino, Reinado*” in *Diccionario Exegetico Del Nuevo Testamento*, Vol. 1. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (ed), Ediciones Sigueme Salamanca, 1996, 602.

⁸² U. LUZ, “*Kingdom, Reign*,” in *The Exegetical Dictionary*, Vol. I, 202.

⁸³ M. HENGEL, *Studies in Early Christology*, T&T Clark, Scotland, 1995, 338.

⁸⁴ Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, 81.

⁸⁵ W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, 82.

In view of the foregoing, Jesus during his mission here on earth did not only preach the kingdom of God verbally. His preaching was accompanied with great miracles. It is based on this we shall now proceed our reflection and see how Jesus concretised this preaching of the kingdom through his deeds. We know that Jesus not only spent the whole of his time convincing people about the Kingdom of his Father. He would not have attracted great multitude if he spent his time talking only about the kingdom. Jesus adopted a method that enabled the people of his time believe the message of the kingdom. Even in the secular or political world, the people aspiring for leadership do not only present empty manifesto to their audience. They try as much as possible to convince the people through their actions. It is through their actions that people will become attracted to them. The same is applicable to Jesus. He did not offer empty message to his audience, rather his message was accompanied by actions.

The significance of Jesus' signs and wonders in relation to the kingdom of God he preached cannot be overemphasised. It is based on the following claim that Brennan Hill writes:

“The kingdom of God was at the very centre of Jesus’ message. The purpose of his miracles was to complement this message with actions that dramatically revealed the presence of the kingdom. Jesus taught that God’s reign of love and salvation was near at hand, and miracles concretely manifested the presence of God’s loving care and healing. God’s reigning power was present in the midst of his people, in the midst of their sufferings, sickness, and death. God was present as consoler, healer, and restorer.”⁸⁶

It is impossible to talk about the ministry of Jesus without referring to his miracles. In the Gospel of Mark, the question of miracle is highly emphasised. In the Gospel of John Jesus' miracles were referred to as signs. Before we continue, it is important we know the meaning each of these Gospels attribute to Miracle. In the Gospel of Mark, miracles signify the struggle between Jesus the Messiah and Satan and the forces of darkness. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus travelled to Galilee teaching in the synagogue and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God, curing all kinds of diseases of the people (Matt 4,23). In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus demonstrates his solidarity with the people by curing them, he presents himself here as the great benefactor of his people. While in the perspective of John, miracles of Jesus are understood as signs that should be understood

⁸⁶ B. HILL, *Jesus the Christ: Contemporary Perspectives*, (2^{ed}), Editor, Twenty-Third Publication, Bayard, France, 1991, 90.

in the light of faith.⁸⁷ For further justification of the above assertion the following biblical citation would be of great importance: “Jesus answered: in all truth I tell you, you are looking for me not because you have seen signs but because you have had all the bread you wanted to eat” (Jn. 6,26).

The kingdom of God Jesus preached is a message accompanied with words and actions. Those who received this message experienced something new and extraordinary in their lives. Jesus did not only limit himself to the preaching of the kingdom. He concretised this kingdom of God by showing his solidarity to those who were suffering, the poor and the simple, those who were sick in body and spirit, the marginalised. These are the solidarities Jesus showed to those who were vulnerable during his mission. The power with which Jesus uses to cure and purify those who are unclean was given to him by God.⁸⁸ The above expression can be further explained through the following biblical citation: “now if it is through Beelzebub that I drive devils out, through whom do your own sons drive them out?” (Lk 11, 19).

The miracle of Jesus are signs of the kingdom of God and its arrival implies the dethronement of the activities of Satan. The miracles of Jesus imply that salvation is not basically in the realm of the spiritual, but is also visible and affect the entire being of man. From this, it is very clear that the miracle of Jesus is not only spiritual it has a visible dimension. As the kingdom of God preached by Jesus is an eschatological reality that point to the future, so are his miracles. The miracle of Jesus implies the eruption of the kingdom of God in our material world. That is why miracles are signs of hope for the future. Miracle is understood as an expression of the incorporation of the total reality of the world to the historical economy of God.⁸⁹

In the miracles of Jesus, the power of God is made visible in the humiliation and in the human scandal. The miracles of Jesus liberate man and offers him the opportunity to follow Jesus. The liberation of man from the power and forces of darkness motivates man to participates in the kingdom of God and all its riches. The miracles of Jesus are avenues that unite the people of God together irrespective of their status: the poor, the lost, the marginalized, all are called to take part in this gift of God.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Cf. J. GNILKA, *Jesus De Nazaré*, 113.

⁸⁸ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 381-387.

⁸⁹ Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesús, El Cristo*, Ediciones Segume- Salamanca, 1986, 117-118.

⁹⁰ Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesús, El Cristo*, 119-120.

Jesus in preaching the kingdom of God did not limit himself to performing miracles, he equally had a very cordial relationship with those at the margin of society, “in what we referred to as the table fellowship tradition. Jesus proclaimed the forgiveness of sins in deeds. Meals played a very important role in the ministry of Jesus.”⁹¹ From the above, it is very clear that Jesus during his mission on earth identified and mixed up with the people whom society abandoned. Again, when we critically observe the Scriptures we will see that Jesus in his preaching and messianic activities had a very close relationship with individuals who were being confronted with various life challenges that turned them into the laughing stocks of the society. It was basically because of this set of human beings that he came into the world. Again, when we study the Scriptures we will see that Jesus spent most of his precious time with these very people.⁹² What we have said so far can be summarised with the following biblical passage: “the Son of Man came, eating and drinking, and they say, look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds” (Matt 11, 19). Commenting on the relevance of Jesus’ relationship with sinners and the little ones in society, E. P. Sanders writes:

“Jesus’ eating with tax collectors and sinners, has probably correctly, been seen as proleptic indication that they would be included in the kingdom: the meals look forward to the messianic banquet, when many would come from east and west and dine with the patriarchs. Several parables tell us that the kingdom is like a banquet, to which many are called.”⁹³

The kingdom of God Jesus preached is a sign that affects the life of so many that met him. On several occasions, these people who met him asked for compassion and to solve their immediate life challenges. These people Jesus had encounter with were individuals who had no means of sustenance, had no influence in the society. They found in Jesus solace and a place of refuge as well as hope. It is very apparent that the people who flocked around Jesus as he travelled along Galilee and its environs were predominantly the simple, individuals who struggled daily to meet their life necessities. Jesus on his part, allowed himself to be surrounded, an attitude that points out clearly the mission of Jesus to the abandoned and the oppressed. Jesus realised all these in view of the Kingdom of

⁹¹ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 87.

⁹² Cf. T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 87.

⁹³ E. P. SANDERS, *Jesus and Judaism*, 208.

God he came to establish. If Jesus were to observe strictly the Jewish Law, he would not have allowed himself to be surrounded by these set of human beings. He allowed them to have free access to him because laws do not matter in the kingdom of God, but those who receive the good news of the kingdom and put them into practice.⁹⁴

The above appear very important in the mission of Jesus. As we have rightly mentioned earlier, the success Jesus recorded in his mission while on earth is because of his simplicity and the cordiality between him and the abandoned in the society. He made himself free and accessible to this group of human beings and this contributed immensely to the success he recorded in his mission. The reign of his Father he came to this world to construct was not limited to empty words but was guided by the solidarity he showed and shared with people.

We have succeeded in addressing the preaching ministry of Jesus and its apparent effects on the people he evangelised. We shall now address the length of Jesus' public life. The first opinion about this can be seen in the synoptic Gospels. But the information in the synoptic Gospel does not conform with the account of the Gospel of John. This is because John in his narrative, presents three successive feasts of the pascal (Jn. 5,1; 6,4; 13,1). With this, one can conclude that Jesus spent two years and one month in his public activities. From the Gospel of John 5,1, some suggest four pascal feast which implies Jesus spent three years and some months in his public activities. However, John 5,1 refers to the feast that took place in John 6,4 or the feast that followed the Pentecost. In view of this, John 6,4 is not out of place, but we need to follow the account of John 4,54. Therefore, Jesus' public life lasted for two years and some months. The chronology we have seen so far does not contradict synoptic Gospel's account.⁹⁵

In the synoptic Gospels, we have various celebration of the feast of pascal during the public life of Jesus. In this case, the first miracle of the multiplication of bread according to the account of the Gospel of Mark 6, 39, took place at spring because during this period the grasses were green. The above account conforms with that of the Gospel of John 6,4, that situates the miracle of the multiplication of bread during the pascal feast. The year of Jesus' death occurred during the reign of Pontius Pilate who was the procurator of the Jews between the years 26 and 36 d.C. Jesus was crucified on Friday 14 or 15 of Nisan.

⁹⁴ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 412-420.

⁹⁵ Cf. H. HAAG (...et al), *Diccionario De La Biblia*, Barcelona Editorial Herder, 1981, 967- 968.

However, it is very difficult to establish that Jesus died on the 15th of Nisan, the day of Jewish pascal or the vespers of their pascal celebration.⁹⁶ Scholars differ in opinion with regards to the date Jesus died. However, “if we follow the chronology portrayed in the synoptics we arrive at no more than two years public ministry of Jesus. John’s account indicates two years for Jesus ministry.”⁹⁷

More so, the accounts of the synoptics are considered as the best with regards to the various feasts celebrated while the Gospel of John is highly indispensable when we talk about the years Jesus spent in his public mission.⁹⁸

In the final analysis, the Gospel of John affirms that Jesus celebrated three paschal feasts during his public life. The first paschal feast Jesus celebrated has to do with the time when he purified the temple. The second has to do with the multiplication of bread, and finally the paschal feast of his death and resurrection that becomes the great feast of Christians. However, the synoptics Gospel only speak of one paschal feast, that is, the cross and the resurrection. After this feast, Jesus went to Jerusalem. It was during this journey to Jerusalem that Jesus graciously offered himself to be crucified on the cross. Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem was described by the letter to the Hebrews as the ascension to a tent that was not made by human hands (Heb. 9, 24). This ascension to the presence of God passed through the event of the cross; the ascension of love where Jesus consummated his love for humanity.⁹⁹ Jesus crowned his earthly life through the drama of his passion and death which logically ends the mission his Father entrusted to his care. Through this great event of his passion and death, Jesus quietly bowed out of the stage and the memory of this great event lingers on. Jesus ended his mission on earth by “justifying us through his sacrificial death on the cross, thus reconciling us to the Father.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Cf. H. HAAG (...et al), *Diccionario De La Biblia*, 968.

⁹⁷ H. SCHWARZ, *Christology*, 91-92.

⁹⁸ Cf. H. SCHWARZ, *Christology*, 92.

⁹⁹ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Jesus De Nazaré: Da Entrada em Jerusalém até à Ressurreição* parte II, Princípia, Cascais, 2011, 13-14.

¹⁰⁰ T. G. WEINANDY, *Jesus the Christ*, Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, Huntington, IN., 2003, 112.

1.6 SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER ONE

Jesus continues to be a mysterious figure of all history because his personality surpasses human description. The more we try to describe in great depth his personality, the more we discover that he is a figure that transcends human description, and the more we discover that what we know about Jesus is only superficial. He is an unfathomable figure. It is in the light of this, that we want to bring to completion our reflection in this chapter by affirming that our knowledge about Jesus remains on the level of superficiality. In this chapter a lot of things were communicated to us about the personality of Jesus. Even though this information remains on the level of superficiality they have widened our understanding about Jesus. What we have seen in this chapter about Jesus, introduced us into the world in which Jesus lived and gives us fundamental information about the early life of Jesus.

In the final analysis, all we have said about Jesus in this very chapter are significant and very educative. All we have studied here about Jesus are vital and sufficient but cannot give us a complete and coherent information about this great figure of history. Jesus is beyond what we think of, he is beyond what our human imagination and creativity can conceived. In this case, the best way to fathom the figure of Jesus “is not only through intellectual study but also through prayer and virtuous lives. It is within this context that the Holy Spirit will deepen our knowledge about Jesus and his redemptive work.”¹⁰¹

The next chapter will examine critically the theological insights about the historical Jesus. It will equally expose the various arguments and trends that reflect the figure of Jesus.

¹⁰¹ T. G. WEINANDY, *Jesus the Christ*, 2003, 15.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORICAL JESUS: THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his, “who do people say the Son of man is?” And they said, “some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” But you, he said, “who do you say I am?” Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, “you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, Simon son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven” (Matt 16,11-17).

The above question continues to be a fundamental question in any critical investigation to the life of the historical Jesus. In our quest to unfold the real identity of who the historical Jesus is, our point of departure finds expression in the above question Jesus puts across to his disciples. It was this question that introduced the disciples into the world of Jesus. In view of this, in a thorough and critical investigation into the life and personality of Jesus we need to ask the question, “Who then is the historical Jesus?” We were born and brought up in a society where Jesus becomes the focal point and the centre of our Christian spirituality to the point that, all our activities to a very large extent revolve around him. The question comes again, “who then is the historical Jesus?”

The historical Jesus as the name implies, is the knowledge of Jesus obtained by the historian through scientific medium of the modern historical investigation. But what is the necessity of launching this historical investigation, if we have an absolute knowledge of the mystery that Jesus represents? Is this investigation legitimate? Is this investigation necessary? From all indication, this investigation is highly necessary because, if we accept by faith the incarnated Son of God in our history, then it is worthwhile we know his historical dimension and his concrete human condition.¹⁰² To embark upon a research on the historical dimension of Jesus, references will be made to the different epochs that treat this subject under investigation and other relevant materials.

The main concern of this chapter is to critically examine and presents the various arguments and contributions about the historical Jesus. This chapter will examine the following: the first quest of the historical Jesus, the second quest of the historical Jesus,

¹⁰² Cf. J. A. PAGOLA, *Jesus Uma abordagem histórica, suplemento*, Tradução de Bernardino Henrique, Gráfica de Coimbra, Coimbra, 2008, 9-8.

the new quest of the historical Jesus, the third quest of the historical Jesus, the contribution of the Jesus Seminar, the biblical testimonies of the historical Jesus, and finally the synthesis and conclusion of chapter two. More so, in this chapter, an effort will be made to put across my own personal contribution and possibly my personal reflection with regards to this investigation.

2.1 THE FIRST QUEST OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

The first research of the historical Jesus began with Reimarus. He was the first who began a very critical approach to the question of the historical Jesus. He was a professor of languages at Hamburg and a pioneer of religion of reason. Shortly after his death, G. E. Lessing published seven fragments of his works without revealing the identity of the author.¹⁰³ In his reflection about the historical Jesus, he began by creating a disparity between the preaching of Jesus and the faith of the disciples in Christ. For him, there is a great distinction between what the Apostles present in their writings about Jesus and what Jesus himself taught during his earthly life.¹⁰⁴ With this in mind, he concludes that, the preaching of Jesus can only be understood in the context of the Jewish religion of his time. What then is the content of Jesus' message? For Reimarus, the centre of Jesus' preaching is the coming of the Kingdom of heaven, and consequently calling everybody to conversion. Jesus in his preaching promised the Kingdom of Christ or Messiah, the Jews anxiously awaited.¹⁰⁵ In view of this, the passage below explicitly explains the focal point of Jesus' message.

“Reimarus takes as his starting point the question regarding the content of the preaching of Jesus. We are justified, he says, in drawing an absolute distinction between the teaching of the Apostles in their writings and what Jesus Himself in His own lifetimes proclaimed and taught. What belongs to the preaching of Jesus is clearly to be recognized. It is contained in two phrases of identical meaning, “Repent and, believe the Gospel,” or, as it is put elsewhere, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Cf. THEISSEN Gerd, Annette Merz, *O Jesus Histórico Um manual*, Edição Loyola, São Paulo, Brasil, 2002, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. THEISSEN Gerd, Annette Merz, *O Jesus Histórico*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. THEISSEN Gerd, Annette Merz, *O Jesus Histórico*, 21.

¹⁰⁶ A. SCHWEITZER, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, United States, Courier Corporation, U. S. A., 2015, 16.

The above passage clearly portrays the centrality of Jesus' message while he was on earth in the thinking of Reimarus. But unfortunately, Jesus never lived to fulfil his dreams of establishing the Kingdom of heaven he earlier promised, instead, he expired on the wood of the cross. Consequently, his followers who abandoned all they had to follow Jesus, made away with his remains and went about proclaiming that he has been raised from the dead.¹⁰⁷ In furtherance of the above assertion, he states emphatically that:

“He established that Jesus was a Jewish revolutionary whose disciples, after his failure and death, conceived the idea that he was divine. They stole his body and rewrote the story of his life in the light of an alternative Jewish expectation, not utilized by Jesus himself, according to which a divine being would appear on the clouds to end the world.”¹⁰⁸

This passage clearly demonstrates Reimarus dissatisfaction about the tale of Jesus' triumphant victory over the powers of death. From my own standpoint, his inability to accept that Jesus truly resurrected from the death, probably stems from the fact that, there was nobody who stayed around the grave and witnessed Jesus' resurrection apart from the soldiers who were in deep sleep. However, there are a lot of testimonies in the sacred Scriptures that attested to this universal fact. Am not in any way criticising Reimarus' standpoint, but just to draw our attention to the fact that, he was one sided in his argument.

Reimarus was not alone in this reflection. there are many other scholars who demonstrated interest in this reflection. One of these great scholars is David Strauss¹⁰⁹. Strauss is a Philosopher and Theologian who published a sensational work about the life of Jesus that provoked a great uproar. In his reflection about the figure of the historical Jesus, he reawakens our consciousness to the fact that, the Gospels are nothing but myth.¹¹⁰ In view of this, the Jesus of the Gospel in the reflection of Strauss is nothing but a myth. This led him to propound his own theory of myth claiming that, a myth is a term used to refute the historical credibility of the Gospels. To sustain his argument, he quickly used the instance of the stars that guided the magi during the birth of Jesus, affirming the incredibility of that event. In the final analysis, for him, Jesus is only an idea, but many mythological stories were formed with reference to his figure; as such it is very

¹⁰⁷ Cf. M. J. BORG, *Jesus at 200*, Westview Press, U. S. A., 1997, 127.

¹⁰⁸ N. T. WRIGHT “Problems” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. III. 796.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. THEISSEN Gerd, Annette Merz, *O Jesus Histórico*, 22.

¹¹⁰ Cf. THEISSEN Gerd, Annette Merz, *O Jesus Histórico*, 22.

fundamental according to him to modify mythological language about Jesus to a rational language.¹¹¹ So, he concludes that:

“The heart of the Gospel was an idea: that the divine and human are joined in reality. Jesus was only important because he symbolized that idea. And the Gospels are substantially myths about his miraculous birth, deeds, and resurrection composed by the early communities to promote this idea of divine-human unity. For him, Christian faith was not based on a person, but on a philosophical concept. Jesus of Nazareth has little significance in himself other than in being a symbol of this concept”¹¹²

This text as a matter of fact, relegated to the background the importance of Jesus in the worldview of Strauss, throwing to the mud all the great and wonderful events that happened in the life of Jesus when he was in this planet earth. The fundamental point we could draw from his reflection, is the fact that, all what we know and hear about Jesus recorded in the Scriptures are not authentic. However, Strauss’ arguments were refuted and as such, he was eventually disengaged or freed from all the exalted positions he occupied as a professor at the institution of higher learning.¹¹³

After this author, we have another great scholar who continues with this interesting but critical reflection, that is, Renan. He introduced another interesting investigation about the historical Jesus. He presented initially a pacific image of Jesus, and emphasizes his insistence in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. But in his view, this Jesus ended up as a revolutionary, after his brief moments in Jerusalem. As such, he began preaching the Kingdom of God apocalyptically and was ready to defend this even at the point of death.¹¹⁴ It is clear from this author, that Jesus never lose sight of the reign of God that he came to the earth to inaugurate; he strongly laid an emphasis on the significance and the necessity of the kingship of God he came to inaugurate on the earth.

This reflection was, however, continued by another important author in this field of research, that is, Martin Kahler. He made a brief and a very important contribution to this subject under investigation. Evaluating the previous reflections about the historical Jesus, he focuses his reflection basically on the disparity between the Jesus who lived and

¹¹¹ Cf. J. GNILKA, *Jesus De Nazaré*, 17.

¹¹² B. Hill, *Jesus the Christ*, 43.

¹¹³ Cf. B. HILL, *Jesus the Christ*, 43.

¹¹⁴ Cf. J. GNILKA, *Jesus De Nazaré*, 19.

worked with us on earth and the Christ of the Christian faith.¹¹⁵ In furtherance of his assertion, he made it very explicit that “the historical Jesus refers to the man Jesus of Nazareth as he can be known through historical research, and the Christ of faith is the Jesus proclaimed by the Christian faith”.¹¹⁶ According to him, the Christ of the Christian faith is basically the Christ known in the light of the Gospel endowed with divine titles. And while the historical Jesus is considered as the Galilean preacher who ended up his preaching carrier on the wood of the cross.¹¹⁷ In the final analysis, he affirms that, “the historical Jesus cannot be the object of Christian faith but the Christ of faith; this, however, does not negate the importance of the historical Jesus”.¹¹⁸

In the light of this, the foregoing reflection does not in any way suggests that the Jesus who incarnated, who was born of the blessed Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit is insignificant. Again, this brief reflection does not equally suggest that, the historical Jesus never existed. But according to my own understanding, this reflection reawakens our curiosity to evaluate critically the Jesus that lived with us on this earth and the Christ who was raised from the dead.

This investigation continues with Albert Schweitzer shortly after the reflection of Martin Kahler. He began his reflection by refuting the arguments presented previously about the historical Jesus. For him, the authors we have evaluated so far, present Jesus according to their own image and Christological orientation. In view of this, the rationalists understood Jesus as a moral preacher, the idealists understood him as the personification of humanity, and the socialists, as the friend of the poor and a social reformer.¹¹⁹ Consequently, he affirms that, the Jesus of Nazareth who preached the morality of the Kingdom of heaven, that established on earth the Kingdom of heaven and died shamefully on the wood of the cross, never existed. For him, the historical Jesus is an invention of the rationalist adorned with a historical garment.¹²⁰ In furtherance of his argument, he writes:

¹¹⁵ Cf. T.P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 12.

¹¹⁶ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?*.12.

¹¹⁷ Cf. B. SESBOUÉ, *Pensar e Viver a Fé no Terceiro Milénio: Convite aos homens e mulher do nosso tempo*, Gráfica de Coimbra, Coimbra, 1999, 257-258.

¹¹⁸ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 12.

¹¹⁹ Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesus El Cristo: Verdad e Imagen*, (6º ed), Tradujo Severiano Talavero, Sigueme-Salamanca, 1986, 35.

¹²⁰ Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesus El Cristo*, 36.

“The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethics of the Kingdom of God, who founded the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and died to give his work its final consecration, never had any existence. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb.”¹²¹

This brief text demonstrates Albert’s views and discontentment about the historical Jesus. He was very critical in his reflection and made a very radical shift from the authors we have evaluated so far. We are not affirming that his radical shift sets him above the authors we have previously seen, rather we are being concern with the originality of his ideas.

In the final analysis, he refuted the question of eschatology, arguing that eschatology does not constitutes the fundamental base for the biographical presentation of the activity of Jesus.¹²² To sustain his argument about eschatology, he made reference to the episode in the Scriptures where Jesus commissioned his disciples and sent them on mission to people of Israel¹²³ and instructed them with the following words: “I promise you that before you have gone to all the towns of Israel, the Son of man will come” (Matt 10,23). He understood this statement of Jesus as fictitious because Jesus never fulfilled what he told his disciples, the disciples however, came back from their mission and discovered that, what Jesus told them never came to fulfilment.¹²⁴

From the above reflection, critical minds will reason along with me that, Schweitzer was very critical and radical in his approach to the question of the historical Jesus. But in his reflection, they are so many vital points that were raised that are of great importance to this subject under investigation.

This reflection as a matter of fact never ended with Schweitzer. Another scholar whose contribution is of immense significance is Bultmann. How does he conceive the question of the historical Jesus? He began his reflection by affirming that, through history we came to conclusion that Jesus existed, and that he was baptized by John the Baptist, and we are equally aware that, he died on the wood of the cross. Apart from the foregoing, we do not know more about the figure of the historical Jesus¹²⁵. He persistently affirms that:

¹²¹ A. SCHWEITZER, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 396.

¹²² Cf. J. GNILKA, *Jesus De Nazaré*, 19.

¹²³ Cf. J. GNILKA, *Jesus De Nazaret: Mensagem e História*, Barcelona Editorial Herder, 1993, 21.

¹²⁴ Cf. J. GNILKA, *Jesus De Nazaret: Mensagem e História*, 21-22.

¹²⁵ Cf. B. SESBOUÉ, *Pensar e Viver a Fé*, 259.

“It is both impossible and undesirable to try and discover the personality of Jesus himself. All that is needed is the bare fact that he died on a cross. In Bultmann’s history of religious program, the main features of early Christianity were not derived from Jewish sources but Hellenistic ones. The life and ministry of Jesus, firmly anchored in Judaism, were therefore only of tangential interest for Christian theology.”¹²⁶

He further affirms that, the Gospels only contain what we may call the preaching of the primitive Church; with this, he concludes that, the Gospels does not contain the history of Jesus, they are only a means through which the primitive Church preached Jesus. He further insists that, the Gospels are not history in the right sense of the word and as such, cannot offer us adequate information about Jesus that will enable us to know Jesus sufficiently and what he realized while on earth.¹²⁷ In furtherance of the above assertions, he insists that, “the knowledge of the historical Jesus was not really possible and unattainable and in any case, was not really important”.¹²⁸

In the light of the aforementioned, contrary to Bultmann’s standpoint, José Ramon Busto, affirms that, for us to embark on a very critical Christological reflection, our fundamental and basic sources are the Gospels; because the Gospels offer us authentic history of Jesus. From the theological point of view, Ramon submits that, the history of Jesus is highly relevant for our faith.¹²⁹ Consequently, for him, the historical Jesus, his message and activities cannot be the source of the Christology of the kerygma of the Church. For him, we cannot establish continuity between the kerygmatic proclamation of Christ and the historical Jesus; Christ according to the Christology of Bultmann has no real base in the historical Jesus.¹³⁰

In our investigation about the historical Jesus, we cannot but relegate the idea of Bultmann. Although Bultmann was very critical in his treatment of the historical Jesus, even at that, his reflections are of immense importance in this investigation. Having said this, we will now proceed to the New Quest of the historical Jesus. This New Quest is a kind of reaction to Bultmann’s reflection about the figure of Jesus.

¹²⁶ N. T. WRIGHT, “Problems” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. III, 798.

¹²⁷ Cf. B. S. JOSÉ-RAMÓN, *Iniciação à Cristologia*, Tradução de A. Freire, Editorial Sal Terrae, Santander, 1991, 22-23

¹²⁸ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 14.

¹²⁹ Cf. B. S. José-Ramón, *Iniciação à Cristologia*, 23.

¹³⁰ Cf. J. DUPUIS, *Introducción a La Cristologia*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Estella, 1994, 33.

2.2 THE NEW QUEST OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

The reflection of Bultmann ushers in the New Quest of the historical Jesus. In this New Quest, Ernest Kasemann refuted the earlier postulations of Bultmann about the historical Jesus in 1954 during a conference. For Kasemann, the preaching of the disciples of Jesus offer us an important information about the gestures of Jesus before the Easter.¹³¹ In view of the foregoing, he writes:

“Kasemann claims that we need to ask about the Jesus of history for three reasons. The first is that, as Bultmann emphasized, the singularity of the salvific event in Jesus, that Jesus, was important. Second, God’s self- disclosure occurred in space and time. It has incarnational quality. It took place within history. We concern ourselves with Jesus of Nazareth for this reason. And third, the question of the historical Jesus is the question of the continuity between Jesus and us.”¹³²

It is very evident in this reflection that, Kasemann refuted the previous arguments of his predecessors and offers us another practical dimension of studying the historical Jesus. Kasemann reawaken our consciousness to so many things in this new quest. In the first place, he affirms that, “the Gospels while not themselves histories, contain more historical materials than had been previously acknowledged”.¹³³ He persistently affirms the credibility of the canonical materials as the basic source in our investigation about the historical Jesus. He equally draws our attention to the fact that, even though the canonical materials are the basic source we have about the historical Jesus, that does not relegate to the background the proclamation of the first Christian community about the figure of Jesus. However, believe in the historical Jesus does not rely explicitly on the proclamation of the first Christian community and again, believe in the historical Jesus does not totally neglect the importance of the proclamation of the first Christian community.¹³⁴ In the final analysis, “the historical Jesus helps us to interpret the Kerygma”.¹³⁵ Having said this, we shall now proceed to the third quest of the historical Jesus and evaluate its contribution to this investigation.

¹³¹ Cf. B. SESBOUÉ, *Pensar e Viver a Fé*, g260.

¹³² H. SCHWARZ, *Christology*, 49-50.

¹³³ T.P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 14.

¹³⁴ Cf. T.P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 14.

¹³⁵ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 14.

2.3 THE THIRD QUEST OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

We have learnt from the new quest the importance of the gospels materials in our desire to unfold the identity of Jesus. Our intention here, is to expose the basic contribution of the third quest and its theological relevance about this investigation.

What then are the basic contributions of the third? And how can their contributions be of help to us in this investigation? These and more will be address in this third quest. By way of definition, “third quest” as the name implies is a combined research enterprise of renowned and selected scholars who sat and deliberated about the historical Jesus and came out with some conclusions.¹³⁶ A good number of scholars in this third quest made reference to non-canonical materials in their search for the historical Jesus, like the Gospel of Peter, Mary, and some other related information from non-canonical materials. And while some in this group restricted themselves to information from canonical materials.¹³⁷

To get the clearer picture of the identity of Jesus, “the third quest scholars, research into the second temple Judaism has helped to better understanding of Jesus in his own historical context as a first century, Palestinian Jew.”¹³⁸ Situating Jesus within his Jewish background implies knowing everything about him, his background, and all his activities while on this planet earth. ¹³⁹It is through this that we can get to the real identity of the historical Jesus. In furtherance of this point, we cannot claim to know somebody without first knowing virtually all that concerns the person. In view of this, the basic intention of this third quest is to unfold the authentic identity of the historical Jesus with a reference to his Jewish origin.

Having said this, these scholars simultaneously arrived at a conclusion that Jesus:

“Jesus is recognized as a devout Jew who went to Jerusalem on the Passover pilgrimage and revered the temple. Scholars are now trying to understand Jesus in his own time and

¹³⁶ Cf. A. E. MCGRATH, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*, (2nd ed), Blackwell Publishers LTD., Oxford, 281.

¹³⁷ Cf. A. E. MCGRATH, *Historical Theology*, 281.

¹³⁸ T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 15.

¹³⁹ Cf. T. P. RAUSCH, *Who is Jesus?* 15

within the Judaism which produced him. In contrast to the position in Germany at the beginning of this century, it is widely accepted that Jesus was a Jew.”¹⁴⁰

From the above passage, some members of these Third Quest portray the identity of Jesus with reference to his Jewish environment and background. From the passage we can infer that, for these great scholars, Jesus is better known when we situate him within the Jewish environment where he was born and brought up. some of these scholars view Jesus or accepted the fact that, he was fundamentally “influenced by apocalyptic thought and that his message was eschatological as he proclaimed the dawning of God’s rule, the Kingdom of God.”¹⁴¹ Some of these great theologians present Jesus as an apocalyptic figure who unravels mysteries and while others situated or understood him within the apocalyptic preaching of John the Baptist. Here it was generally believed that Jesus began his mission on earth with John the Baptist and that there is no clear-cut distinction between his preaching and that of Jesus;¹⁴² because both of their “preaching or message had similar eschatological tone.”¹⁴³ From the above, it clear that in our intention to unravel the authentic identity of the historical Jesus, we cannot afford to lose sight of the preaching of John the Baptist who was his herald.

Having said this, we shall now proceed to present the various reactions of this scholars about the subject under investigation. Most of these scholars’ views about Jesus are taken from “Merrigan and Haers in their book *“The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for Unity in Contemporary Christology”*. The first notable scholar in this field is Johnson Crossan. What are his views about the figure of Jesus? According to him, Jesus is fundamentally a wretched Jew who bent on attacking the organized social order, changing and violating the established social order by eating and drinking with those the society labelled as the less privilege.¹⁴⁴ In view of this Altizer writes:

“Crossan Jesus is not only a Mediterranean Jewish peasant, but a Jewish Cynic and magician. Jesus is established within a peasant world in turmoil, one leading to a peasant revolt, which Crossan sees as a fundamental ground of the Jewish-Roman War of 60-70,

¹⁴⁰ J. MERRIGAN, Haers J., *The Myriad Christ: Plurality and the Quest for unity in Contemporary Christology*, Leuven, University Press, 2000, 49

¹⁴¹ T. MERRIGAN, Haers J., *The myriad Christ*, 50.

¹⁴² Cf. T. MERRIGAN, Haers J., *The Myriad Christ*, 50.

¹⁴³ T. MERRIGAN, Haers J., *The Myriad Christ*, 50.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. A. E. MCGRATH, *The Historical Theology*, 281.

an eschatological war ushering in the end of the primitive Christianity and the Judaism of Jesus' time."¹⁴⁵

From this passage, Jesus is viewed from the perspective of Crossan as one who changes the Jewish established order through his radical teachings. Jesus' association with the less privilege, abandoned, oppressed, was considered by Crossan as going contrary to the Jewish¹⁴⁶ established "hierarchy, his call was basically to the unclean, the degraded, and the poor, who are blessed by the advent of the Kingdom of God. And such a Kingdom according to him, is a kingdom of nobodies."¹⁴⁷ In the final analysis, he considers Jesus as a great figure whose basic intention is to modify the laid down regulations of the Jewish world.¹⁴⁸ For him Jesus is nothing other than a great "revolutionary, even if he is innocent of any political program".¹⁴⁹

This great scholar is not alone in this third quest, there are other scholars who equally contributed meaningfully to this subject under investigation whose contributions are considered vital as far as this research work is concern. Worthy of note among these scholars is Marcus Borg. What were his approach to the question of the historical Jesus? Before we proceed in our exposition of his view about Jesus, we will like to draw our attention to the fact that, each scholar in this third quest have different vision with regard to the question under investigation. Each scholar speaks according to his or her Christological orientation. And again, this does not negate the fact that, there are no point of convergence in their reflection about the historical figure of Jesus. Having said this, according to this author, Jesus is considered as a focal point of our faith, the image of God, and the revelation of God to humanity.¹⁵⁰ This author to drive his point home, made a wonderful distinction between the "pre-Easter Jesus and the post-Easter Jesus. According to him, the pre-Easter Jesus is the Jesus of Nazareth, the first century Jewish Peasant, and while the post-Easter Jesus is the canonical Jesus, that is, the New Testament Jesus."¹⁵¹

The author in creating distinction between the Jesus as we can feel and experience as a human being, and the Jesus preached to us in the Scriptures, one is compelled to draw a

¹⁴⁵ T. J. J. ALTIZER, *The Contemporary Jesus*, SCM Press LTD., London, 1998, 34.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. T. J. J. ALTIZER, *The Contemporary Jesus*, 34.

¹⁴⁷ T. J. J. ALTIZER, *The Contemporary Jesus*, 34.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. T. J. J. ALTIZER, *The Contemporary Jesus*, 35

¹⁴⁹ T. J. J. ALTIZER, *The Contemporary Jesus*, 35.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. M. J. BORG, *Jesus at 2000*, 7.

¹⁵¹ M. J. BORG, *Jesus at 2000*, 8.

radical conclusion that, the both are one and distinct. The distinction here is not in any way pointing to the fact that, the Jesus proclaimed in the Sacred Scriptures is different from the Jesus that lived and shared all our human feelings. Further illustrations will however, explain the necessity and the importance of this distinction. In view of this, the Jesus who incarnated and became man like us, is otherwise known and addressed as the Jesus that suffered on the wood of the cross, in the language of Borg.¹⁵² And while the “post-Easter Jesus”¹⁵³ is considered as a figure who sees beyond this physical realm, he is considered as having the same nature with God himself, in conformity with the proclamation of the Catholic profession of faith. The post-Easter Jesus in the perspective of this author, is the one proclaimed by the Scriptures, the one who resurrected gloriously from the dead.¹⁵⁴ In the finally analysis, Borg made a clear distinction between the Jesus who suffered and died on the cross and the Jesus who resurrected from the dead. For more clarifications on this distinction, he uses the following terminologies: “the pre-Easter Jesus was a human being, finite and mortal, limited as all humans are and while the post-Easter Jesus is a spiritual reality, finite and eternal.”¹⁵⁵

In the light of the foregoing, the third quest tries to situate the identity of Jesus within his Jewish environment. Most of the authors we have presented in this third quest situated the historical Jesus with a reference to his Jewish background even though some differ in their exposition of the identity of Jesus. Having said this, from my own point of view, I think that the perfect way of knowing somebody is getting to the root of the person, his family background, social life, educational life, and of course religion. It is through this basic information that we have a clearer picture of somebody. This is precisely what some of the scholars in this third quest did. In view of this, this third quest contributed immensely to our research in knowing who the historical Jesus is.

Having dealt with the three quests for the historical Jesus, we can now proceed to another point that we consider very vital in this research, that is, the contribution of Jesus Seminar. My intention here is to briefly present their picture of the historical Jesus and its relevance as far as this research is concern.

¹⁵² Cf. Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus at 2000*, 8.

¹⁵³ M. J. BORG, *Jesus at 2000*, 11.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. M. J. BORG, *Jesus at 2000*, 8.

¹⁵⁵ M. J. BORG, *Jesus at 2000*, 8.

2.4 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE JESUS SEMINAR

What is Jesus Seminar? Who are the initiator of this movement? What are its fundamental contributions to the quest of the historical Jesus? These are the questions this sub-topic seeks to address here. Jesus seminar as the name implies is a contemporary academic movement, a group of renowned biblical scholars whose basic objective is to unfold the real identity of who Jesus is. ¹⁵⁶From my own point of view, these great scholars set out for this endless search with a reference to the controversy about the authentic identity of Jesus. Their basic intention is to educate and sensitize the modern man who is been confronted with the question: who is Jesus? In the light of this, according to Luke Johnson Timothy, Jesus Seminar is basically “a small self-selected association of academics who meet twice a year to debate the historical Jesus. The seminar was founded by Robert Funk in 1985 in Westar Institute, California.” ¹⁵⁷

For according to Funk, these esteem scholars are great exegetes who lecture in the various theological institutions across the globe. Most of these scholars are from the North America and the United States of America respectively. These great scholars in their quest to unfold the real identity of Jesus, divided their round table discussion in three sections. The first section of their round table discussion about the historical Jesus began in 1985-1991¹⁵⁸. Their basic discussion in this first section centres on the sayings that came directly from Jesus. To facilitate the flow of their reflection, these great scholars embarked on a critical investigation of the authentic sayings that came directly from Jesus. ¹⁵⁹ At the end of their investigation, they came up with the following statistics: “the seminar sorted through about 1,500 versions of approximately 500 sayings ascribed to Jesus”.¹⁶⁰

The second section of this great seminar centres on what Jesus realized while on earth. The scholars lunched into a very critical investigation with reference to what Jesus realized or did to ascertain his authentic identity. ¹⁶¹ After this serious and very hectic

¹⁵⁶ Cf. L.T. JOHNSON, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospel*, Harper One, U. S. A., 1996, 1.

¹⁵⁷ L. T. JOHNSON, *The Real Jesus*, 1.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus according to the Jesus Seminar*, (2nded), Polebridge, Farmington, MN., 2015, p. ix.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, x.

¹⁶⁰ W. ROBERT FUNK, and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, x.

¹⁶¹ Cf. W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, xi.

task, they came to realize about “387 reports of 176 events and deeds, twenty-nine of 176 events were deemed to contain historical information”.¹⁶² The final section of the round table discussion among the scholars focuses basically on the aftermath or the results of the sayings that came directly from Jesus. From the information gathered from the two round table discussions, the scholars began to create the biography of Jesus.¹⁶³

After these three rigorous sections, these great scholars never relented in their investigation about this great figure of history (Jesus). They went into a more critical investigation and arrived at some basic information that will enable us gain access to the real identity of the historical Jesus. Some of this fundamental information were already highlighted in the previous quest (third quest), and as such the presentation of some these basic and fundamental information will be discussed briefly as much as possible. They began by acknowledging the fundamental and universal fact that “Jesus of Nazareth was a real human being, Jesus was once a follower of John the Baptist; he quit John and returned to Galilee where he began eating and drinking in profane style”.¹⁶⁴ They equally view Jesus as a miracle worker, as one who foretold the imminent coming of the kingdom through proverbs. Apart from the facts we have addressed so far, they equally acknowledge the fact that the resurrected Jesus manifested himself to some of his followers.¹⁶⁵

In examining the words spoken by Jesus himself, the final section of the seminar draws the following conclusion: “Jesus was an artisan of words, Jesus created stories for his audience to interpret on their own, the insights from Jesus’s parables and sayings provide the listeners with new image of the kingdom of heaven”.¹⁶⁶

From the reflection of these great scholars in their endless search for the authentic identity of the historical Jesus, ushers into a publication of what we call “the Five Gospel”.¹⁶⁷ Our intention here is to examine critically the content of this new publication and the relevant information inherent in this new publication. Our reflection here is going to adopt the

¹⁶² W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey *The Gospel of Jesus*, xi.

¹⁶³ Cf. W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, xi.

¹⁶⁴ W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, 4.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, 4.

¹⁶⁶ W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, 4-5.

¹⁶⁷ L.T. JOHNSON Timothy, *The real Jesus*, 20.

pattern of exposition, that is, exposing the basic information found in this new publication.

The first section of this Five Gospel gives new interpretation to some of the sayings of Jesus in the canonical Gospels. The first modification of the words of Jesus in this five Gospel, centre on the words of Jesus to the unclean man ¹⁶⁸ : “A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees “if you are willing you can made me clean. Filled with compassion Jesus reached out his hand and said be clean” (Mk 1:40). According to the five gospels, Jesus never said to the unclean man he is willing to cure him, rather Jesus addressed him in a very simple manner, ¹⁶⁹ “you are cleansed”. ¹⁷⁰ .This five-gospel refuted out rightly that Jesus is not the Son of man rather he was the son of Adam. ¹⁷¹ A logical reason was not actually given by these five gospels for negating the Christological title of the “son of man”. And, they were no justification given to their claim that Jesus is the son of Adam.

The second aspect of these five gospels concentrates basically on the words and the miracles of Jesus. To create a distinction between the authentic words of Jesus, scholars in this five-gospel decided to use images that will enable us to know the exact words that come from Jesus, and words that people claimed came directly from Jesus. Secondly, they used the same image with regards to the authentic miracle of Jesus, miracle that were not performed by Jesus but ascribed to him and miracles that appear to be carried out by Jesus but without an absolute assurance. ¹⁷² These images are presented as follows:

The sayings of Jesus ¹⁷³:

With regards to the authentic words of Jesus, these scholars used the following illustrations that will enable us to know exactly the words spoken by Jesus, that is, the words spoken by Jesus without any trace of doubt. To realize this, they use various colours that will enable us to create distinction between the authentic words spoken by Jesus and

¹⁶⁸ Cf. L.T. JOHNSON, *The Real Jesus*, 21.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. L.T. JOHNSON, *The Real Jesus*, 21.

¹⁷⁰ L.T. JOHNSON, *The Real Jesus*, 21.

¹⁷¹ Cf. L.T. JOHNSON, *The Real Jesus*, 21.

¹⁷² Cf. W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, xii.

¹⁷³ Cf. W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, xii.

ones attributed to him. With regards to the words spoken by Jesus without any trace of doubt or words attributed to Jesus, ¹⁷⁴they use the following colours:

“The Red Colour: This red colour implies Jesus without any iota of doubt utters a word of this kind.

The Black Colour: This black colour implies, Jesus never utters any word of this nature

The Pink Colour: This pink colour implies that, these words came from Jesus himself, but we are not quite certain. And with Regards to the deeds of Jesus we have the following illustration:

The Red Colour: This colour implies that, we are quite certain that Jesus performed this miracle and it is backed up with evidence.

The Black Colour: We are not quite certain if this was realized by Jesus.”¹⁷⁵

In view of the foregoing, this is how these great scholars in their round table section came to a conclusion about the authenticity of the words and miracles of Jesus. From their analysis, we can't figure out their justification with this method they used in ascertaining the authenticity of what comes from Jesus. But from their analysis, we are obliged to infer that there are some words and actions that were not attributed to Jesus if we are to follow their line of arguments. Having said this, we can now proceed to evaluate some of the key authors in this Jesus seminar and of course their contributions and critical analysis about the figure of Jesus.

Our intention here is to give a synthesis of the contribution of these authors and its relevance for this research. The first author we are going to consider in this regard is Borg. We have already highlighted the view of this author in the previous quest, but his contribution continues to be relevant as far as this section is concern. Having said this, according to this author, Jesus is basically a wonder worker, a prophet, someone who attracts multitude. He further declares Jesus as the redeemer of the entire human race whose basic mission is to grant redemption to the entire humanity, evident in his proclamation of the kingdom of God.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Cf. W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, xii

¹⁷⁵ W. ROBERT FUNK and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Gospel of Jesus*, xii.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. L. T. JOHNSON, *The Real Jesus*, 40.

Borg is not alone in this enterprise, another great figure whose contribution is of great importance to us here in this research is Charlesworth. What are his approach to the question of the historical Jesus? He began his reflection by affirming that many scholars present the historical Jesus according to their own perceptions and orientations. For him, the worshippers or the followers of Jesus were not only concern with the resurrected Jesus but also with Jesus of Nazareth who lived among them. These worshippers of Jesus equally draw our attention to the fact that, the resurrected Jesus and the Jesus of Nazareth are one and the same.¹⁷⁷

Charlesworth in his attempt to construct the identity of the historical Jesus, situates his reflection on the cordiality that existed between Jesus and John the Baptist. Having said this, he began by affirming that Jesus started his messianic mission on earth through the Baptism of John the Baptist; that is, the baptism of John the Baptist officially ushers or marks the beginning of Jesus' mission. He also began his mission by attracting great numbers of followers who admired his method of teaching. He was considered as a wonder worker, whom during his mission here on earth realized a lot of miracles. He was equally understood by this great scholar as a motivational teacher who tells people about the imminent coming of the Kingdom of heaven.¹⁷⁸ He equally taught his followers the famous prayer "our Father" and admonished them to address God with this title. He equally considered Jesus as one who confidently embraced his fate of dying for the entire humanity. Jesus is equally understood by him as one who repeatedly went through several and untold abandonment by the people He addressed as his apostles.¹⁷⁹

He further presents Jesus as one who went through a shameful and deadly end on the wood of the cross. After his cruelly and deadly end on the wood of the cross, his disciples started spreading the new that he resurrected from the tomb. This news of his resurrection continues to spread among believers and even the unbelievers. This news diminished when he was proclaimed to be alive, and his second coming to judge the living and the dead was constantly proclaimed.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Cf. J. H. CHARLESWORTH, (ed), *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Doubleday, New York, 1992, 150-151.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. J. H. CHARLESWORTH, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 151.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. J. H. CHARLESWORTH, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 151.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. J. H. CHARLESWORTH, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 151-152.

Another important figure in our search for the historical Jesus whose contribution is of great significance in this research is Vermes. How did he approach the question of the historical Jesus? Geza Vermes ushers in his reflection about Jesus by affirming that a critical survey of the Gospels without any iota of doubt shows that those who experienced the messianic mission of Jesus, identify Him as a prophet. Apart from this, the great multitude that followed Jesus in His triumphant entry into the holy city of Jerusalem identify Him as a prophet. This very title attributed to Jesus by the People stems from the miracles he performed while he was on earth.¹⁸¹ They are so many occasions in the Scripture where this title was attributed to Jesus very often when he heals. This is very evident in the Gospel of Luke when Jesus resurrected the only son of a widow:

“Then he went up and touched the bier and the bearers stood still, and he said, young man, I tell you: “get up”. And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying, “a great prophet has risen up among us; God has visited his people. And this view of him spread throughout Judea and all over the countryside” (Lk 7,14-17).

This title applied to Jesus by his followers was misinterpreted severally by the leading figure in the Jewish society. These leading figures doubted the prophetic title attributed to Jesus, because from their perspective a prophet is not supposed to interact with sinners. They are many occasions in the Scripture where Jesus interacted and mixed up freely with sinners. It is this interaction that raises doubt about the authenticity of this title. On one occasion the authenticity of Jesus’ prophetic title was questioned by the leading Jewish figure when he allowed himself to be touched by a sinful woman ¹⁸² and they exclaimed: “If this fellow were a real prophet, he would know who this woman that touches him, and what sort of woman she is, a sinner”.¹⁸³

Apart from the above, they are several places where Jesus was addressed as a prophet. This is very evident during the passion narrative when Jesus was arrested by the soldiers, he was insulted and spat upon. In the mist of this public disgrace of Jesus one of the soldiers deliberately asked Jesus the following question: “Then they spat in his face and hit him with their fists; others said as they struck him, “prophesy to us, Christ! Who hits you then?” (Matt 26,67-68). From this short and inspiring passage, it is very clear that the

¹⁸¹ Cf. G. VERMES, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels*, U. S. A., 1973, 87.

¹⁸² Cf. G. VERMES, *Jesus the Jew*, 87.

¹⁸³ G. VERMES, *Jesus the Jew*, 87.

designation “prophet” is a title attributed to Jesus not only by his followers but by those who even persecuted and executed him. Apart from this, there are other places where Jesus attributed to himself this prophetic title in the Scripture. The Scripture also affirms the occasion where Jesus plainly attributed to himself indirectly the prophetic title. Jesus attributed to himself indirectly this title because of the lack of faith of his people who do not believe him and who do not recognise all the wonders he performed. And because of that Jesus teaches:

“And Jesus said to them, A prophet is despised only in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house, and he could work no miracle there, except that he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith” (Mk 6,4-6).

This short but enriching passage proves to us that Jesus indirectly referred to himself as a prophet. When he asserts that a prophet is not respected and recognised in his own country, Jesus is not referring to another prophet outside but himself. And when we vividly take a critical look at the Gospels we get to understand that; Jesus’ actions and activities portray him as a prophet. They are various testimonies in the Scriptures that testify to this fact as we have seen above.

More so, as we have seen above that Jesus’ actions and activities while on earth portray him as a prophetic figure; this is an indisputable reality. But the prophetic figure of Jesus is not like other prophets we know in the biblical tradition, he is different from other prophets with regards to his function. We know that the prophets in the Old and the New Testament hear from God and pass across their messages to the people in words like “and the word of the Lord was addressed to me”, “and the hand of the Lord came upon me” and so many other expressions. But when we take a critical survey to the prophetic figure of Jesus we discover to a very large extent a clear-cut distinction from the prophets of old. Jesus never used expressions like “and the Lord say to me, and the word of the Lord came to me”. Rather, he speaks with power telling or sharing with people his deep relationship with the Father.¹⁸⁴

Furthermore, Jesus’ prophetic title is considerably distinct from the other prophets. Jesus invites people to repentance just like other prophets, but Jesus does not conform with the ancient prophets who presented a very negative picture of God as a revengeful God.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. B. HILL, *Jesus the Christ*, 65.

Rather he presents to the people a very positive image of God who cares and cherishes his people.¹⁸⁵

Another most interesting title attributed to Jesus is that of a teacher. In the Gospels we were made to understand that Jesus is called a teacher. A lot of questions were raised about this title. Many believed, the name “teacher” is a name attributed to Jesus to showcase his superiority over others. This name became officially or formally attributed to individuals who are been entrusted with the function of impacting knowledge into a group of individuals.¹⁸⁶ There is something very interesting about Jesus’ way of teaching that distinguished him from other teachers who existed during his public life, this is because “Jesus’ style of teaching was much less formal than that of the scribes”.¹⁸⁷

Having presented the various reflections of scholars about the figure of Jesus, we will now proceed to the New Testament testimonies about the figure of Jesus. Our intention in the next sub-heading centres fundamentally on how the New Testament conceives the historical Jesus.

2.5 THE BIBLICAL TESTIMONIES ABOUT THE HISTORICAL JESUS

One of the most controversial evidence we have about the historical Jesus are the Gospels. Some scholars to a very large extent believe the Gospels are not histories and as such they cannot offer us a logical and coherent testimony about the historical Jesus. But a very critical survey shows that the Gospels offer a lot of information about Jesus. Our intention here is not to criticize the Gospels materials as insufficient to supply basic information about Jesus, but our intention here focuses on the various information about Jesus graphically presented in the Gospels and the letters of saint Paul. The New Testament will continue to be a central reference in our research to know who Jesus is and all he realized while on earth. Mathias Newman affirms the significance of the Gospel as a fundamental source for the life of Jesus when he writes:

“The whole New Testament witnesses to the mystery of Jesus Christ: who he was, what he accomplished in the world and in people’s lives. The New Testament confesses Jesus

¹⁸⁵ Cf. B. HILL, *Jesus the Christ*, 65.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. B. HILL, *Jesus the Christ*, 56.

¹⁸⁷ B. HILL, *Jesus the Christ*, 56-57.

as the one who sums up the whole history of God's dealing with Israel, who inaugurates the Church as a new community of God's people, and who begins a new and final chapter in God's dealings with creation and humanity, the definitive moment of God's revelation and plan."¹⁸⁸

This text however, portrays the significance of the New Testament as one of the fundamental source to ascertain the historical Jesus. From my own point of view, in our quest to know the figure of Jesus we cannot but make reference to the Gospel materials. Having said this, we will now proceed to explore the various images of the historical Jesus in the gospels.

The synoptics Gospels and the Gospel of John offer us some basic information about the life and ministry of Jesus. But the Fourth Gospel presents the history of Jesus in a different perspective. In view of this, we are going to begin with the synoptics Gospels where Christology is elaborated from the base.¹⁸⁹ We shall begin with Gospel of Matthew.

2. 6 JESUS IN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

The narrative Christology of the Gospel of Matthew follows the principal line of the Markan Christology: Jesus is pre-eminently the Son of God destined to suffer and die and will be raised to life. But in relating the history of Jesus, the Gospel of Matthew enriches the Markan Christology in various ways. Matthew is quite convinced that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. Consequently, he began his narration with the genealogy that divided the history of Israel in three distinct parts: from Abraham to David, from David to the Exile and from the Exile to the Messiah. The appearance of the Messiah is the culminating point of the history of Israel, and Jesus is this Messiah.¹⁹⁰ Ratzinger writes:

"Matthew places Jesus' family tree at the beginning of his Gospel. This genealogy is arranged to show lineal descent from Abraham and David, and it presents Jesus as the inheritor both of the promise made to Abraham and of God's pledges to David, to whom

¹⁸⁸ M. NEUMAN, and Thomas P. Walters, (ed), *Christology True God, True man: Catholic Basic, a pastoral guide*, Loyola press, Chicago, 2002, 2.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa do Novo Testamento*, Editora Vozes, Petrópolis, RJ, 2003, 19.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 75.

God has promised, through all of Israel sins and all of God's chastisements, an eternal Kingdom."¹⁹¹

Furthermore, Matthew considers Jesus as the descendant of David who was born in the city of David in Bethlehem, as foretold by the prophet. But this descendant of David is not the valiant Messiah many expected, but Messiah who came simply to inaugurate the Kingdom of God to subdue the dominion of Satan. This Messiah from the lineage of David came purposely to take upon himself our infirmities. He is the Messiah that proclaims justice to the nations. Jesus as the Messiah from the Davidic lineage, is considered as the obedient son of God who was conceived by the power of Holy Spirit and who has an intimate relationship with the Father that distinguished him from others. His relationship with the Father is highly intimate to the point that nobody knows the Son except the Father and vice-versa.¹⁹²

Jesus is equally presented in the Christology of Matthew as the Son of man: "For the son of man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels and then he will reward each person according to his work" (Matt 16, 27). But the use of the son of man in the Christology of Matthew have double connotations. In the first place, Jesus uses this expression when he speaks about his destiny to suffer, to die and resurrect from the death. Secondly, the son of man is a technical term used to identify Jesus as an eschatological judge. This title "son of man" is not referring to any other person than the son of God and his kingdom, and the final establishment of the dominion of God.¹⁹³

The Christology of Matthew is a redemptive Christology. It does not limit itself in telling the readers about the identity of Jesus, but also explain explicitly what Jesus did for the entire human race. Put simply, Jesus realized for the entire human race the forgiveness of sins and inaugurating the kingdom of God through his messianic ministry. In the final analysis, the titles like "son of God, Messiah, son of David, and son of man, occupy a very significant place in the Christology of Matthew. The central focus of the Gospel of Matthew is basically centred on Jesus as the fulfilment of the Scriptures of Israel.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹J. RATZINGER, *Jesus the Christ*, 9.

¹⁹² Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristology Narrativa*, 75-76.

¹⁹³ Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 68-69.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 80.

2.7 JESUS IN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The Gospel of Mark develops his Christology in two stages: the first period starts with the confession of Peter when he proclaims Jesus as the Messiah, and the posterior period to this confession, that culminate in the famous confession of the centurion when he asserts that Jesus is really the son of God. In the first period, the narrator of the Gospel of Mark places Jesus as the figure responsible for the eruption of the Lordship of God; the second focuses on the destiny of Jesus as the son of man destined to suffer, to die, and resurrect from the dead.¹⁹⁵

The Christology of the Gospel of Mark considers Jesus as the Messiah, son of God, who is destined to suffer, die, resurrect from the dead and will come again as the Son of Man to reunite the elects. Having said this, we will now evaluate each of these titles in the light of Gospel of Mark. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is Messiah because he is the Son of God. But it appears that the contemporaries of Jesus never used the expression “Son of God” as a messianic title, but it was used in the Gospel of Mark. At the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus was declared as the Son of God (Mk 1,1). We have various examples in the Scriptures where Jesus was addressed as the Son of God. The first example is the situation where demons identify Jesus as the Son of God (Mk 5,7).¹⁹⁶ Apart from this, they are various occasions where Jesus is attributed with this title “Son of God”. But our major concern here is that, what does it implies? What is the theological implication of this title? To tackle this theological problem, Oscar Cullman writes:

“The title “Son of God” does indeed point to the divine majesty of Jesus and his ultimate oneness with God, it essentially implies his obedience to the Father. The designation “Son of God” does make the Father-son relationship between God and Christ a special and quite unique one.”¹⁹⁷

From this brief and enriching text, we discover that in the Christology of Mark the title “Son of God” expresses the intimate union between Jesus and the Father. This union with the Father and his willing acceptance to suffer for the sins of the entire human race qualifies him with the title “Son of God”.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 26-27.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 48.

¹⁹⁷O. CULLMAN, *The Christology of the New Testament*, John Knox Press, Westminster, 1959, 270.

Apart from the above analysis, the title has another connotation among the leading figures in the Jewish world. This title has three connotations among the Israelites; this points to the fact that, in the past, the title “Son of God” is not exclusively for Jesus. The entire Israelites are being referred to as “Son of God”, rulers in the Jewish world are equally attributed with this title, individuals who are been entrusted with the function of piloting the affairs of God are equally addressed with this title.¹⁹⁸ They are various biblical passages where Israelites are been addressed as sons of God:

“Then say to Pharaoh, this is what the Lord says: “Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, “let my son go, so that he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; so, I will kill your firstborn son” (Ex. 4,22-23).

From the passage, the title “Son of God” was not only attributed to Jesus in the Jewish world. But Jesus’ sonship as a matter of fact is different from that of the Israelites. The title “Son of God” in the words of Ratzinger indicates the “true glimpse into the inner being of Jesus, indeed into the being of God himself”.¹⁹⁹ And while the title “Son of Man” in the Christology of Mark, is an enigmatic title but central in the Christology of Mark. Is not a confessional title in comparison to titles like “Son of God, Messiah. “The term “Son of Man” came from the lips of Jesus explicitly. The term has various connotations in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus uses this title basically to refer to his suffering, death and resurrection²⁰⁰:

“He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him” (Mk 8, 31-32).

In the final analysis, the Christology of Mark can be summarised with reference to the following terminologies: Son of God, Messiah, Son of Man. None of these terms can be understood sufficiently when separated from Marcan narrative.²⁰¹ Having said this, we can now proceed to the Gospel of Luke and evaluate briefly the various images of Jesus.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. O. CULLMAN, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 272-273.

¹⁹⁹ J. RATZINGER, *Jesus the Christ*, 344.

²⁰⁰ Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 49.

²⁰¹ Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 50.

2.8 JESUS IN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The Christology in the Gospel of Luke is not to a very large extent different from the two synoptics Gospels we have seen previously. His perception of Jesus is not too far from the conception the two synoptics Gospels had about Jesus. But for us to proceed in our reflection, it is necessary to take a brief survey over some biblical passages that will enable us to understand how the Gospel of Luke conceives Jesus. This biblical text will serve as our point of departure in this reflection:

“And there were Shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2,8-11).

Apart from the above affirmation, there are various places in the Gospel of Luke where the designation “Lord” was attributed to Jesus: “But why am I favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me” (Lk 1, 43). Shortly after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, there are several places where this title was attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke; for example: “They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. They found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon” (Lk 24,33-34). We can confidently conclude that Luke, attributed the title “Lord” to Jesus in his Christology. What is the theological implication of this title? To do justice to this question Thomas Weinandy writes:

“When the first Christians designated Jesus as their Lord, they were attributing to him a divine title, one that previously had been reserved to Yahweh alone. The divine nature of this title is accented in that scholars argue that its use first arose within a Christian liturgical context, that is, one in which Jesus is offered divine worship as Lord.”²⁰²

The title “Lord” is a divine title attributed to Jesus by the virtue of his resurrection from the dead. In the Scripture, there are some instances where this title was applied to Jesus repeatedly; for example, the proclamation of Jesus as Lord in the confession of faith.²⁰³

²⁰² T. G. WEINANDY, *Jesus the Christ*, 42.

²⁰³ Cf. B. SESBOUÉ, *Penser e Vivre a Fé*, 412-413.

There are many scriptural passages that declare the Lordship of Jesus for instance in the first letter of saint Paul to the Corinthians, we have the following evidence:

“Because of that, I want to make it quite clear to you that no one who says, “A curse on Jesus” can be speaking in the Spirit of God, and nobody is able to say, Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit” (1Cor 12, 3). Apart from this, the Lordship of Jesus is equally evident in the Christological hymn of the letter of saint Paul to the Philippians, where saint Paul affirms emphatically the significance of this title: “So that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2, 10-11).

Another significant title in the Gospel of Luke is “Christ”. The term implies one who is anointed. This title is a Greek transposition of the Hebrew term “Messiah” that signifies in the Old Testament “the anointed of God, King, Priest and Prophet, expected by the people of Israelites to grant them redemption. Attributing Jesus this title, the Christian community identifies him as the Jewish Messiah. We are quite aware that Jesus was not anointed with a physical oil, but in the event of his baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit is understood as a divine unction.²⁰⁴ In the final analysis, this title “Christ” was given a very significant position in the Christological reflection of Luke evident in the reflection of Fitmayer:

“A more important Lukan title for Jesus, however, is “*Christos*”. As a title, it is derived from Palestinian Judaism, where it was often used to designate an anointed agent of YHWH for the service, protection, and deliverance of Israel. Within the last two centuries before the time of Jesus it came to connote further an expected anointed agent, to be sent by God either in the Davidic tradition for the restoration of Israel and the triumph of God’s power.”²⁰⁵

Apart from the above title, there are other titles and designations attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. They were emphasized because of their significance in the Gospel of Luke. This does not mean that the other titles attributed to Jesus in Luke’s Christology are not vital. The above was outlined for emphasis sake.

²⁰⁴ Cf. B. SESBOUÉ, *Penser e Viver a Fé*, 412-413.

²⁰⁵ J. A. FITZMYER, *To Advance the Gospel: New Testament Studies*, (2^{ed}), WM. B. Eerdmans, publication Company, New York, 1998, 259.

Having said this, we now proceed to the Gospel of John and analyse the various images attributed to Jesus and their theological implication.

2.9 JESUS IN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

In our quest to unfold the various evidences of the historical Jesus' identity in the Gospels, we cannot afford to relegate some of the information in the Gospel of John about Jesus. Our basic intention here is basically to expose the various designations John attributed to Jesus in his Gospel and the various theological implications relevant to this research.

We shall begin our reflection here by outlining the various title John attributed to Jesus in his Christological reflection. We shall limit ourselves in this reflection to the following titles: I am, Son of God, Messiah, Prophet.²⁰⁶ we shall begin with the first title but before that, it is highly important we ask ourselves this question, "what does he meant when he declares Jesus as the I am? The designation "I am" is typical of the Gospel of John. Among the evangelists, he was the only figure that attributed this designation to Jesus. In John's reflection, this title implies Jesus' self-revelation, where he auto proclaims himself as the I am.²⁰⁷ There are so many instances where Jesus made this solemn declaration about himself in the Gospel of John:

"Jesus answered them: I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever hunger; no who believes in me will ever thirst. But as, as I have told you, you can see me and still you do not believe. Everyone whom the Father gives me will come to me; I will certainly not reject anyone who comes to me" (Jn. 6, 35-37).

Apart from the above, there are so many other instances where Jesus attributes to himself this title: "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world" (Jn. 6,51). This title is equally present in the Old Testament²⁰⁸ when God commissioned Moses with a special duty of liberating the people of Israel from the cruel leadership of

²⁰⁶CF. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Escritos de São João*, Universidade Católica Editora, Lisboa, 2004, p.79.

²⁰⁷ Cf. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Escrito de São João*, 82.

²⁰⁸ Cf. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Escrito de São João*, 82.

King Herod. Moses who was afraid of carrying out this duty because he feared King Herod received the following instruction from God:

“Moses then said to God, Look, if I go to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your ancestors has sent me to you, and they say to me “What is his name?” what am I to tell them? God said to Moses, “I am he who is”. And he said, “this is what you are to say to Israelites, “I am has sent me to you” (Ex. 3,13-14).

In the final analysis, this title in the Gospel of John expresses or reveals the Being and the divine nature of Jesus.²⁰⁹

Another designation attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John is Jesus as Messiah. The title “Messiah” appears in the Gospel of John on several occasions²¹⁰. The first occasion where this title was explicitly attributed to Jesus was in the Gospel of John 1, 41: “The first thing that Andrew did was to find his brother and say to him, “we have found the Messiah, which means the Christ” (Jn. 1,41). This title was equally attributed to Jesus in his discussion with the woman of Samaritan: “The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah, that is, Christ is coming; and when he comes he will explain everything. Jesus said, “That is who I am, I who speak to you” (Jn.4, 25-26).

More so, Jesus is also presented in the Gospel of John as the “Son of God”. This title attributed to Jesus by John indicates the intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father. As a son, Jesus was sent by the Father. As son, Jesus depended on the Father and obeys the Father.²¹¹ There are so many instances in the Gospel of John where Jesus attributes to himself this title, for examples:

“The Jews fetched stones to stone him, so Jesus said to them “I have shown you many good works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?” The Jews answered him, “We are stoning you, not for doing good work, but for blasphemy; though you are only a man, you claim to be God” (Jn. 10,31-33).

It is clear from the above passage that Jesus attributes to himself this title indirectly. Jesus in his quest to prove to the Jews that he is actually the son of God, made further statements to justify his claim: “

²⁰⁹ Cf. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Escrito de São João*, 82

²¹⁰ Cf. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Escrito de São João*, 84.

²¹¹ Cf. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Escritos de São João*, 83.

“Yet to someone whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world you say, “you are blaspheming” because I said, I am Son of God. If I am not doing my Father’s work, there is no need to believe me; but I am doing it; then if you refuse to believe in me, at least believe in the work I do; then you will know for certain that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn. 10,36-38).

From this passage, Jesus demonstrates to the Jews and the rest of the people listening to him the authentic relationship he has with the Father. He draws their attention to the fact that, even if there are sceptical about his personality, they should at least be convinced of what he realized through his Father.

Finally, in the Gospel of John Jesus is equally addressed as a prophet²¹² in some occasions as we are going to examine in this reflection. There are so many instances where people attribute this title to Jesus in the Scriptures. The first example we have here is the case of the cure of the blind man²¹³ who exclaimed after his cure: “So they spoke to the blind man again, “What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?” The man answered, “He is a prophet” (Jn. 9,17). Apart from this we have another instance where Jesus is being refer to as a prophet for instance: “Some of the crowd who had been listening said “He is indeed the prophet” (Jn. 7, 40). From the above biblical texts, it is evident that, Jesus is recognized as a prophet. The prophetic title attributed to Jesus here is not just a mere prophetic title, but the final prophet promised by God to Moses in Dt 18, 15.²¹⁴

In the final analysis, after examining the Gospels materials and their various testimonies about the figure of Jesus, our next target is to examine Pauline’s image of Jesus. This will be briefly discussed in the next subheading.

2.10 JESUS IN THE LIGHT OF APOSTLE PAUL’S PERSPECTIVE

Our analysis here is going to be very brief to avoid repetitions. The images we have seen so far about Jesus in the Gospels are to a very large extent related to Pauline’s view of Jesus. As such, we will be brief in our reflection.

²¹² Cf. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Escritos de São João*, 88.

²¹³ Cf. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Escritos de São João*, 88.

²¹⁴ Cf. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Escritos de São João*, 88.

The point of departure of Paul's Christology finds expression in his experience on his way to Damascus, where he saw the resurrected Lord²¹⁵ and this is explicitly explained as follows: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?" (1 Corinth 9,1-2). Paul further explains his experience with the resurrected Christ in these words: "Last of all he appeared to me too, as though I was a child born abnormally" (1Corinth 15, 8). In view of this, the centrality of Paul's Gospel centres on the death and resurrection of Jesus, all his preaching centres on this great redemptive event.²¹⁶ This redemptive event Paul emphasized in his Christological reflection was equally given a very significant place in one of his letters when he states that: "Because we believe in him who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus who was handed over to death for our sins and raised to life for our Justification" (Rom 4,25). From these passages we have seen so far, the event of Christ's death and resurrection occupy a central place in Pauline Christology.

Having said this, we now proceed to evaluate Paul's images of Jesus in his Christological reflection. Paul began by affirming that Christ's obedience unto death and his exaltation as the first born among those who resurrected from the dead qualifies him with the title, the New Adam.²¹⁷ James Dunn in affirming this designation writes:

"Adam represents the former, the race of humanity which ends in death, the embodiment which cannot make the transition through death without transformation. Christ represents the latter, the race of humanity which begins from the resurrection of the dead, the embodiment of resurrection. The first Adam stands for humankind, from creation up to death. The last Adam stands for eschatological humankind, the life of the new creation, from resurrection onwards."²¹⁸

From this passage, we can conclude that Christ the New Adam, is the perfect image of God that reflects the glory of God. By his death and resurrection from the dead, he became the life given Spirit. And because God resurrected him from the dead, believers enjoy an intimate relationship with the resurrected Lord.²¹⁹ As such Christ according to Paul is the

²¹⁵ Cf. B. SESBOUÉ, *Pensar e Viver a Fé*, 422.

²¹⁶ Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 200.

²¹⁷ Cf. F.J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 201.

²¹⁸ J.D.G. DUNN, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Company, Grand Rapids, MI., 1998, 242.

²¹⁹ Cf. F. J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 201.

New Adam, a figure who redeems and surpasses the first Adam.²²⁰ Paul does not view Christ only from the perspective of resurrection, he equally considers him as the crucified and as the crucified, Christ is officially proclaimed as a servant. He is equally considered as the pascal lamb.²²¹ Christ is the New Adam that restores celestial image; he is for the entire humanity the new beginning.²²²

Christ is equally seen by Paul as the image of the invisible and the first born of creation who radiates the glory of God²²³:

“He is the image of the unseen God, the first Born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible, thrones, ruling forces, sovereignties, powers, all things were created through him and for him. He exists before all things and in him all things hold together, he is the Head of the Body, that is, the Church” (Colo 1, 15-18).

Here in this passage Paul presents Christ as the image of the invisible God and of course the first born of all creation; he is the image of the invisible God because all things were created in him, through him and for him; this expression presuppose that God Created the world through the action of his Son.²²⁴

In the final analysis, the great titles of Paul for Christ are as follows, “Son”, and “Lord”.²²⁵ The title “Lord” in the Pauline reflection, confers on Jesus the status of the resurrected in such a way that, Jesus is worthy of adoration just like God. The Pauline Church situates or confers on Jesus a transcendental status, just like God. While the title, “Christ” in Pauline’s perspective, appears like a functional title. Paul receives the title “Lord” probably from the community of the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem, from which right from the beginning, Jesus is Lord; this implies that, Jesus is Lord in his status of exaltation and resurrection who is worthy of the same adoration attributed to YHWH. And while the title “Son of God” appears 17 times (Rom. 8, 3), and this presupposes the pre-

²²⁰ Cf. J.C. CARVALHO, *Apontamentos não publicado de Escrito Paulino*, Universidade Católica, 2015/2016, 91.

²²¹ Cf. J.C. CARVALHO, *Apontamentos*, p. 92.

²²² Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Jesus Cristo*, traduzido por Fernando Melro, União Gráfica, Lisboa, 1969, 157

²²³ Cf. F. J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 211.

²²⁴ Cf. F. J. MATERA, *Cristologia Narrativa*, 213.

²²⁵ Cf. J. C. CARVALHO, “O Rosto de Cristo no Epistolário Paulino” in *Bíblica Série* 31, (2008), 115.

existence of Jesus.²²⁶ Emphasizing the significance of this title attributed to Jesus in Paul's reflection, Herman Ridderbos writes:

“The whole preaching of the historical and future revelation of Christ is supported by the confession of Christ as the Son of God, in the supra-and peripheral sense of the word. It can even rightly be said that the sending of the Son by the Father in the fullness of time presupposes his pre-existence with God. This pre-existence of Christ with the Father so emphatically declared by Paul underlies his whole Christology and makes it possible to conceive of all the attributes and power that he ascribes to Christ exclusively as the consequence of his exaltation.”²²⁷

This short passage summarizes the focal point of Paul's reflection about the figure of Jesus. In ascribing this title to Christ, he clearly reminds us of the story of incarnation, where the Son of man assumed human condition and offers us access to the Father, the consequence of this self-emptiness is explicitly expressed in the title “Son of God”.

Furthermore, Paul considers Jesus as the wisdom of God; Jesus as the wisdom of God is pre-existent. In him God makes a public show of the wisdom of the world. In him God reveals the true wisdom through the proclamation of the crucified Messiah, so that the crucified Christ is now the true wisdom of God.²²⁸ This is explicitly explained in one of the Letters of Saint Paul:

“While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for wisdom, we are preaching a crucified Christ: to the Jews an obstacle they cannot get over, to the gentile's foolishness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1Corinth 1,22-25).

In view of this, the tragedy of the cross, is the means through which God manifests his glory through the forgiveness of the sins of humanity²²⁹ and consequently in the words of James Dunn “Christ accursed on the cross plays this same role as the decisive resolution to the problem of how the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles for whom it was also intended”.²³⁰ The above quotation showcases the centrality of the cross in the Pauline theology. At the wood of the cross, Christ emptied himself and offers himself as

²²⁶ Cf. J. C. CARVALHO, “*O Rosto de Cristo no Epistolário Paulino*”, p.115.

²²⁷ H. RIDDERBOS, Paul: *An Outline of His Theology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975, 68.

²²⁸ Cf. J. C. CARVALHO, “*O Rosto de Cristo no Epistolário Paulino*”, in *Bíblica*, 120.

²²⁹ Cf. J.C. CARVALHO, “*O Rosto de Cristo no Epistolário Paulino*”, in *Bíblica*, 120.

²³⁰ J. D.G. DUNN, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p.208.

a sacrifice for our redemption and offers us admittance into the kingdom of his Father. The cross is the throne where the resurrected Christ sat, the cross is so important in such a way that, the personality of Christ and the cross are inseparable.²³¹

In the final analysis, Christ for Paul is not basically the resurrected Christ but also the crucified Christ, Christ understood in the light of the pascal mystery. He further presents Christ as the immolated lamb.²³² From the above, the centrality of the cross is highly evident. Paul has various designations for the figure of Jesus, but he considers the experience of the cross as the focal point in his desire to presents to us the personality of Jesus.

2.11 SYNTHESIS OF THE SECOND CHAPTER

Conclusively, we have now come to the end of the second part of our reflection. You will agree with me that, so many things were said about the historical Jesus and some of this exposition offer us a glimpse of who Jesus is, and some of these expositions offer us an image that is a beat far away from the reality we are out to investigate. However, we cannot afford to deny the fact that, we have learnt a lot about Jesus in these brief reflections. In these reflections, we were exposed to various images of Jesus constructed by scholars from their perspectives and Christological orientations. In the light of these reflections, we are compelled to ask the following fundamental questions: are these reflections or constructions adequate to unfold who Jesus is? Are these constructions and speculations being able to tell us the real identity of who the historical Jesus is? These are the crucial questions that stimulate our curiosity in this second part of our reflection.

Jesus is beyond all these designations attributed to him. The personality of Jesus is beyond our human comprehension and no expression is adequate to unravel the identity of Jesus, but we acknowledge his supremacy and his significance in our lives; he continues to be a figure that surpasses our human description and analysis. Consequently, Walter Kasper writes:

²³¹ Cf. M. QUESNEL, *Jesus o Homem e o Filho de Deus*, (1^o ed), Editor: Guilherme Valente, 2005, 139.

²³² Cf. J. C. CARVALHO, “O Rosto de Cristo no Epistolário Paulino”, in *Bíblica*, 118.

“Jesus Christ is not an ordinary Christian name and surname, like John Smith, for instance, but an acknowledgement and a confession that Jesus is the Christ. The assertion “Jesus is the Christ” is the basic statement of Christian belief, and Christology is no more than the conscientious elucidation of that proposition. When we say that Jesus is the Christ, we maintain that this unique, irreplaceable Jesus of Nazareth is one and the same time the Christ sent by God: that is, the Messiah anointed of the Spirit, the salvation of the world, and the eschatological fulfilment of history.”²³³

In the final analysis, from the above reflection, it is crystal clear that Jesus continues to be a mystery beyond our description and comprehension, he is a figure that cannot be limited to a particular description, that is, he possesses a lot of characteristics in such a way that, a particular description is insufficient to unfold his real identity, but we are quite aware of the fact that the “profession of faith in Jesus Christ establishes the exactness, uniqueness and distinctiveness of all Christ is about and at the same its universal openness and global relevance.”²³⁴ Jesus continues to be a mystery beyond our description and grasp.

Having said this, we have come to the end of the second part of our reflection. We have equally seen the various images and evidences presented about the historical Jesus, we have equally learnt that, the only reliable sources about the historical Jesus are the New Testament Writings (Gospels). In the third chapter takes up the contemporary approach to the question of the historical Jesus in E.P. Sanders.

²³³ W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, 15-16.

²³⁴ W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, 16.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONTEMPORARY APPROACH TO THE QUESTION OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS IN E. P. SANDERS

We have seen in chapter two the three Quests for the Historical Jesus and the biblical evidence for the historical Jesus. In this third chapter, we aim at exposing the reflection of E. P. Sanders about the historical Jesus. In the previous chapter, we persistently insist on the four canonical Gospels as the only valid evidence for the historical Jesus. In this chapter we shall make reference to other relevant materials outside the Gospels that contain basic information about the historical Jesus. Our methodology here in this chapter will be expository. We shall dwell more on the reflection of E. P. Sanders and other relevant materials related to this topic under investigation.

As we have rightly emphasised initially, the fundamental and principal source we have about the historical Jesus are the Gospels of the New Testament. However, in this chapter, we shall make reference to non-Christian literature that are relevant. We shall equally make reference to another scientific discipline, Astronomy.²³⁵ Sanders recognises the relevance of the sources outside the New Testament Writings in his investigation of the historical Jesus. He made reference to some scholars who are of great importance with regards to the sources outside the New Testament about the historical Jesus, and this scholar will be briefly highlighted here. We will begin our reflection in this first part by addressing the relevance of the non-Christian testimonies about the historical Jesus, and the second parts will address the predicaments of using the writings of the New Testament as our basic sources for the historical Jesus.

²³⁵ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, (5^o ed), Editorial Notícias, Caraça, Cruz Quebrada, 2004. 75.

3.1 EVIDENCE OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS OUTSIDE THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we have rightly point out previously, the only reliable sources we have about the historical Jesus are the four Gospels. That notwithstanding, reference will be made to some important materials outside these Gospels. In his reflection about the evidence of the historical Jesus in the sources outside the New Testament writings, E. P. Sanders referred to two important authors that will be very useful in this chapter.

E. P. Sanders began his reflection by drawing our attention to an important fact that, the major part of the literature of the first century was conserved and written by members of elites in the Roman Emperor. For these elites, Jesus is a great agitator. However, this Roman source that mentions Jesus base their reflection on the Christian report. As a matter of fact, the case against Jesus did not take place in Rome and the archives of Rome does not contain such reports. This is because the archives in Rome were destroyed at the cause of revolt of the 66. This revolt, destroyed Galilee and most of the documents that probably contained some testimonies about Jesus.²³⁶ However, even though some of these documents containing basic information about the historical Jesus were destroyed we have the following testimonies:

“Within the year ten of Jesus’ death, Romans knew that someone named *Christus* was causing tumult among the Jews in Rome. There was conflict in the Jewish community in Rome about whether Jesus had been sent by God and was a Messiah. In another twenty years Christians in the capital city were prominent enough to be persecuted by the emperor Nero, and people knew about their strange superstition and devotion to a man who had been crucified. But knowledge about Jesus was not limited to knowledge of Christianity; that is, had Jesus’ adherents not started a movement that spread to Rome, Jesus would not have made it to into the Roman histories.”²³⁷

From the above even though most of the documents containing vital information about the historical Jesus in the Roman world were not accessible simply because of the havoc created by the war, the passage reawakens our consciousness to the fact that, the Romans were to a very great extent aware of the activities of Jesus. Having said this, we will now evaluate the contribution of some of these authors who referred to the historical Jesus in

²³⁶ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, p.75-76.

²³⁷ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, Allen Lane, the Pengium Press, 1993, p. 49-50.

their reflections. We shall restrict ourselves to three non-Christian authors whose evidences are of immense importance for us in this reflection in the light of Sanders.

3.2 THE EVIDENCE OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS IN FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

Before we proceed in our reflection in this sub-heading, we will briefly present a concise biography of this great author and then proceed to his main contributions and evidences of the historical Jesus in his writings. Josephus was a great historian born in Jerusalem (37 d-c) into a priestly family. Without any iota of doubt, we know, Josephus is a non-Christian source but contains a very significant information about the activities of Jesus of Nazareth and the Judaism of the first century. Josephus belonged to the group of Pharisees. He was a leader of a revolt against the Vespasian exercise in Galilee and was imprisoned. During his imprisonment, he foresaw that the Roman General will become the Emperor and when this came to reality, Flavius protected the new imperial family to the extent of changing his sure name to that of “Roman Flavius”. He wrote a lot of works, for instance, *the History of Judean War*, and *the Judean Antiquity*.²³⁸ The three themes highlighted in this works are as follows: one speaks extensively about John the Baptist, another speaks about the violent death of James the brother of Jesus, and finally one talks about Jesus directly in one of his works known as the *Flavius Testimony*.²³⁹

The aspect that is of great interest for us in this research, is the testimony of Josephus about the figure of the historical Jesus. As we have rightly mentioned initially, Josephus is a not a Christian source but contains important information about the figure of Jesus. In his quest to tell us who the historical Jesus is, he writes:

“Around this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who did surprising deeds, and a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many Greeks. He was Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who in first place came to love him did not give up their affection for him, for on the third day he appeared to them restored to life.”²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 51.

²³⁹ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 51.

²⁴⁰ THEISSEN Gerd, Annette Merz, *The historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, SCM Press, London, 1998, 65-66.

This brief and enriching passage contains some important information about Jesus. It summarises the activities of Jesus and the untold persecution he went through under the Jewish leading figure. However, many scholars expressed their opinions with regards to the above passage. Many believed, these words were not probably written by Flavius Josephus because for them, he was not a Christian. In view of this, many attributes the above passage to a Christian who lived during the time of Jesus who probably vetted the work of Josephus and gave it a Christian undertone. For them the content of the passage would not have come from a non-Christian.²⁴¹ However, there are other scholars who defended the fact that the above passage comes from Josephus himself without any trace of falsification. These latter scholars based their arguments on the fact that, there are some designations Josephus attributed to Jesus that are rarely used among the Christians; designations like “the wise man”. This is only found in Josephus. Another instance they used is that, the argument that Jesus attracted the Jews and the Gentiles is not compatible to Christian sources²⁴². In the XVI, Lutheran philologists and reformers recognised that the testimony of Josephus contain basic Christian confession to the point that, such a passage would not have come from a Jew. But since Josephus spent the whole of his life as a Jew, it is therefore, obvious that a copyist Christian falsified and interpolated the text.

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Even though many expressed their doubts over the attribution of the above passage to Josephus, we cannot deny the fact that we were enriched from the passage. All we know is that, “the author (Josephus) of the only surviving history of the Palestinian Judaism in the first century thought that Jesus was important enough to merit a paragraph in his reflection.”²⁴⁴ Having evaluated the testimony of Josephus, we shall now proceed to another non-Christian scholar whose contribution is of immense significance as far as this chapter is concern.

²⁴¹ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 50.

²⁴² Cf. THEISSEN Gerd, Annette Merz, *O Jesus Histórico*, 86-87.

²⁴³ Cf. THEISSEN Gerd, Annette Merz, *O Jesus Histórico*, 87.

²⁴⁴ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 50.

3.3 THE EVIDENCE OF THE HISTORICAL JEUS IN TACITUS

Before we proceed to his testimony about the historical Jesus we will briefly present his biography. Cornelius Tacitus (56-ca. 120d.c.) as he was fondly called, wrote his very popular book titled the *Annals*. This book presents the history of Rome right from the death of Augustus to the death of Nero. The first part of this book was dedicated to Nero, where Tacitus narrates the story of the fire outbreak in Rome and attributing the cause of this outbreak to the emperor. Christians living in Rome at this particular period were unjustly accused of this fire outbreak. He further affirms that, the Christians professed a believe that negate the official worship of the Roman gods and as such he declared Christianity dangerous for the State.²⁴⁵ However, what is of interest for us here, is his testimony about the figure of the historical Jesus:

“Although Tacitus’ main concern is to describe the brutal execution of Christians in Rome by Nero, he does in passing make three key statements about Jesus. He fixes the time of Christ’s death as being during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (A.D 14-37) and governorship of Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26-36). He affirms that Christ’s death was a matter of execution by the Roman governor of Judea; while nothing is said explicitly of his crucifixion, that would be the natural implication of a Jew being executed in Judea by a Roman governor. The phrase referring to Christ’s execution may be intentionally placed between two references to the torture and execution of Christian.”²⁴⁶

The above passage clearly portrays the notion Tacitus had about the historical Jesus. It offers us some basic information about the historical Jesus. However, our problem with the testimony of Tacitus is to ascertain whether this testimony was written by him. Some argue that Tacitus’ line of argument about the historical Jesus is closely connected or related to that of Flavius Josephus. For others, Tacitus paraphrase Flavius Josephus in his reflection about the historical Jesus because they are traces of Flavius Josephus’ line of thoughts in Tacitus. Others state that, Tacitus was rather bringing to lime light in his reflection the fundamental information people have already known about the historical Jesus.²⁴⁷ Scholars still argue that Tacitus got his information about Jesus probably from

²⁴⁵ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 55-56.

²⁴⁶ J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol. 1, 90.

²⁴⁷ Cf. J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol. 1, 91.

“Pliny his friend who probably conveyed to him the knowledge he had about the Christians. Nor can we exclude the possibility that Tacitus used Roman archives”.²⁴⁸

Having said this, we cannot deny the fact that, we were enriched from this captivating passage of Tacitus about the historical Jesus even though they are controversy surrounding its authenticity. Tacitus offers us basic information about Jesus even though we could not have noticed a clear distinction between him and Flavius Josephus because both gave the same testimony about the historical Jesus. In the final analysis, Josephus and Tacitus contain fundamental information about the historical Jesus.²⁴⁹

3.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF “DATES AND ASTRONOMY”²⁵⁰

Another problem we are confronted with in our research from the point of view of Sanders are basically the problems of dates and astronomy. The first thing Sanders puts into consideration here is the question of the uniformity of dates. This is because we are being confronted with the problem of getting a coherent date about the life and activities of Jesus. In our research so far about the life and activities of Jesus, we are being presented with so many information to the point we cannot ascertain which of these is right.²⁵¹ In justifying the above observation, Sanders draws our attention quickly to the question of the birth of Jesus. The information that came down to us about the birth of Jesus are very diverse in nature. For instance, the Gospel of Matthew gives us a different account about the birth of Jesus²⁵² when he writes: “After Jesus had been born in Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of King Herod, suddenly some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east asking, where is the infant King of the Jews?” (Matt 1:2). While in the Gospel of Luke we have another different account and it reads:

“Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole inhabited world. This census – the first – took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. So, Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judea, to David’s town called

²⁴⁸ J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol. 1, 91.

²⁴⁹ Cf. J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol. 1, 91.

²⁵⁰ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 51.

²⁵¹ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 51.

²⁵² Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 52.

Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, to be registered together with Mary, his Betrothed, who was with child. Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first born" (Matt 2:1-7).

We are being confronted in these two passages with the question of determining the exact date of birth of Jesus and of course the province where he was born. Matthew in his narration presented an account different from that of Luke. In this case, we are obliged to draw a radical conclusion from these two accounts that one cannot determine with certitude the actual date and the province where Jesus was born.

In furtherance of the above, E.P. Sanders continues to draw our attention to another important issue, that is, Astronomy.²⁵³ According to him, "it is always very difficult to square the Gospels with astronomy. According to Matthew, a star attracted the wise men from the east at the time of Jesus' birth. Scholars search for astronomical event that might explain this."²⁵⁴ In continuation of the foregoing, we are also being confronted with the question of the exact date of the death of Jesus. Some believe Jesus was executed on 15th of Nisan on Friday²⁵⁵ while the synoptics Gospels state that Jesus was executed when the pascal lamb was immolated. This happened on pascal vigil that is, Thursday. In the chronology of the synoptic Gospels, Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples on this very day (Thursday) and the following day he was led away to the tribunal to be tried by Pilate, and in the morning of Friday he was condemned to death by the Pilate.²⁵⁶

However, from the perspective of Sanders, the data we have gathered so far about the date of Jesus' birth reveals that we do not have an absolute knowledge with regards to the precise date when he was born. Even if we situate his birth during the reign of King Herod as we have seen in the account of the Gospel of Matthew, there is still a problem of knowing exactly the very year and month when he was born. As we have seen so far, even in the four canonical Gospels we are presented with contradictions.²⁵⁷ In view of this, Sanders concludes that "even if we accept the synoptic Gospels and agree that Jesus was executed on Friday, 15 Nisan, we do not know the precise year, since modern

²⁵³ E.P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 51.

²⁵⁴ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 53.

²⁵⁵ E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 82.

²⁵⁶ Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Jesus De Nazaré: Da Entrada em Jerusalém até à Ressurreição Parte II*, (1^o ed) Princípia Editora, 2011, 94.

²⁵⁷ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 54.

calculations of the ancient Jewish calendar do not reveal a year in which 15 Nisan fell on Friday.”²⁵⁸

In view of the above, E.P. Sanders reawakens our consciousness to the fact that, the uncertainties we have experienced so far in our desire to know with certainty some remarkable dates in the life of Jesus does not in any way implies that we do not know anything about the figure of the historical Jesus. Certainly, we know a lot about Jesus, but the only thing we are advised to do in our research from the point of view of E. P. Sanders, is to be careful and prudent so as not to be too radical in our approach. In view of this, Jesus according to Sanders was born probably in the year 5 or 4 a.e.c. and died between 29 and 31 e.c. even though many investigators prefer the year 33.²⁵⁹

In furtherance of the foregoing, it is always very difficult to write an ancient history. In writing an ancient history, there is need for a good sense of judgement, sensibility and faithfulness to the sources that contain this very history. The sources we have evaluated so far, contain basic information about Jesus, however, we are being advised not to evaluate these sources dogmatically stating that some of the phrases are pure truth and while others are mere fiction.²⁶⁰ From the reflection so far, we discover that even though we came across a lot of contradictions in our quest to unfold the many activities that surrounded the life of the historical Jesus, we can affirm without any iota of doubt that, we have learnt a lot about the historical Jesus as far as this sub-heading is concerned. These contradictions rather help us to gather more data about Jesus.

We shall now proceed to our next sub-heading. Here we are going to reflect on the “problem of studying our main sources, the Gospels. What kind of works are they? How can we best make use of them?”²⁶¹ These are the major questions the next sub-heading seeks to address.

²⁵⁸ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 54.

²⁵⁹ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 82.

²⁶⁰ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira Historia de Jesus*, 84.

²⁶¹ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 58.

3.5 PREDICAMENTS OF USING THE GOSPELS TO TRACE THE HISTORICAL JESUS

In the previous Chapter we affirmed emphatically that the only reliable sources for the historical Jesus are basically the four Gospels. However, our reflection in this sub-heading takes another dimension that is a bit different from what we have affirmed previously about the importance of the Gospels as the fundamental sources for the historical Jesus. Without relegating the four Gospels to the background, it intends to reawaken our consciousness to the predicaments we shall go through in using the Gospels as the basic and indispensable sources for the historical Jesus.

3. 6 THE EMERGENCE OF THE GOSPELS

Our intention here is to give a very brief history of the Gospel, how they originated, how they came into being. It is going to be expository while dwelling more on the reflection of E.P. Sanders.

Sanders began his reflection about the emergence of the Gospels by situating us within the redemptive event of Jesus. He affirms that, after the cruel death of Jesus on the wood of the cross, his apostles abandoned him and concealed themselves, but their hope became revitalised again when he resurrected from the dead. After the resurrection, the apostles were quite sure of the fact that,²⁶² the kingdom announced by Jesus will soon come to its logical accomplishment and as such they all waited patiently in Jerusalem for the actualisation of this long-awaited kingdom. While they waited patiently for this kingdom, they convinced others that their master (Jesus) was the Messiah of Israel and that he will soon come back again and establish the kingdom of God. In view of this, according to Sanders since the apostles were only concerned with the coming of the kingdom of God, they could not get all the materials to write down the biography of Jesus. Since they thought he will be coming back very soon, they were not concerned with the question of writing down his biography for the next generation.²⁶³

²⁶² Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 58.

²⁶³ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 86.

Consequently, in their intention to persuade others about their master, they tell stories of what Jesus had done or said. According to E.P. Sanders, these stories or materials were not probably written down in the first years, but were transmitted orally.²⁶⁴ In view of this, “when the disciples used incidents from Jesus’ life, they wanted to illustrate points, points that were important at that time. In view of the foregoing, a disciple may say something like”²⁶⁵: “Come to me, all who are labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28). Or for instance “Blessed are the gentle for they shall have the earth as inheritance” (Matt 5:4). In these quotations, Jesus never wrote anything down. Most of the words that were transmitted to us are interpreted words that express the reaction of those who listened to his words and passed them across to us. Though these words are real and true, but they do not contain the whole truth.²⁶⁶

Apart from convincing the new converts, they went ahead to educate each other making references to the fundamental event of the life of their master. They equally engaged in a very strict discussion with the Jewish leaders. This event offers us basic information on how the sources about Jesus were developed.²⁶⁷ The positive aspect in the usage of the material about the life of Jesus is the fact of its preservation. It was very useful for the followers of Jesus in their respective activities. Its negative aspect is the fact that, the words and deeds of Jesus were taken from their original context and used in another context, that is, in the preaching and teachings of the disciples.²⁶⁸

In furtherance of the above, according to Sanders so many years have come and gone but Jesus did not come. This however, does not in any way affect the faith of his followers, rather their faith was strengthened. Even though Jesus is yet to come back, they were convinced of the fact that he continues to live as the Lord.²⁶⁹ In view of this, Sanders concludes that these followers of Jesus “in their evangelistic and pedagogical work, they began to cite individual incidents from the life time of Jesus in short forms. That is, instead of quoting the punch line, Christian preachers and teachers used a small unit of material.”²⁷⁰ From my own point of view, Sanders is drawing attention to the various

²⁶⁴ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 87.

²⁶⁵ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 58.

²⁶⁶ Cf. *Evangelho de S. Tomé, Apresentação*, Tradução e Comparação com os Livros Bíblicos de Luís Figueiredo Tomé, Vetorial Editora, Lisboa, 1990, 13.

²⁶⁷ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 58.

²⁶⁸ Cf. E. p. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 87.

²⁶⁹ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 87.

²⁷⁰ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 59.

stages of the formation of the Gospels. These various stages as a matter of fact emanate from the sayings of Jesus which his disciples gathered and began using them to educate others about their master.²⁷¹ The above assertion is justified by the following:

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?” So, he called a little child to him whom he set among them. Then he said, “In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt 18,1-4).

As times goes on, according to E.P. Sanders, these little sayings became registered and put into writings evident in the passage we have cited above. In the light of this, years passed by and Jesus did not come back. Some of his first disciples died and some were martyred, and others went to mission in distant countries. In view of this situation, some Christians decided that there is a necessity of describing a coherent life of Jesus while he was on this planet.²⁷² However, Sanders submits that, “we do not know how many stages lay between the units used in sermons and our present Gospels, but let us say there were two. We shall now also use the technical name for these small units, many of which survive in our present Gospels: periscopes.”²⁷³ According to Sanders, each of these periscopes has a beginning and an end, and each of these periscopes were taken from their original position to another. It appears that the collection of each of these periscopes has a similar theme, for example, the cures or disputes with adversaries were written on Papyrus; they were written and circulated in diverse Christian communities. These collections were reunited together forming what we call today proto-gospels. What are these proto-gospels? They are works that contain a coherent history about an event but not all parts of the history. Apart from the foregoing, proto-gospels consist of a collection of important sayings about the daily life of the Christian communities. They equally contain sayings about the missionary activities of the first Christian communities.²⁷⁴

In view of the aforementioned, this is how the first Gospel was written. However, many investigators state categorically that this first Gospel is that of Mark. Most of the authors used this Gospel and added other materials that the author of Mark never used in his

²⁷¹ Cf. E. P. SANDER, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 58.

²⁷² Cf. E.P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 88.

²⁷³ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 58.

²⁷⁴ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 88.

account. Having said this, the Gospel as we have them presently were written between the years 70 and 90. For example, many researchers situate the Gospel of Mark in the 70s.²⁷⁵

In the words of Sanders, we do not know for sure if this is how the Gospel came into being. But we deduced the process from the finished product. It was verified according to E. P. Sanders that; the synoptic Gospels contain movable periscopes. This is because the final authors of these write ups moved away some periscopes, because some of the units emanate in different contexts in the Gospels.²⁷⁶ In this respect, E. P. Sanders is not in any way negating the fact that, the Gospels cannot offer us information about the life of Jesus, but what he intends to say is that the life of Jesus needs to be studied in a context. For him, Jesus while on earth, said and did things in a context. It is through this means we will be able to know more about Jesus.²⁷⁷ The Gospels as we have them today are according to Sanders periscopes that were organised into a book that pretends to unfold the life of Jesus. However, the original context that inspired these periscopes were lost.²⁷⁸ In the light of the above, E. P. Sanders states emphatically that, the Gospels “as we have them were not written by eyewitnesses based on first-hand knowledge of Jesus”.²⁷⁹ In addition to E.P. Sanders, Bart D. Ehrman affirms that “it does not appear that the authors of the early Gospels are eyewitnesses to the events that they narrate. But they must have gotten their stories from somewhere.”²⁸⁰ From my own point of view, Sanders is not in any way affirming that, the Gospels does not contain vital information about the historical Jesus, but rather drawing our attention to the fact that, we should not limit our investigation about the historical Jesus on the Scriptures alone. He invites us to study Jesus holistically.

²⁷⁵ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 88-89.

²⁷⁶ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 89.

²⁷⁷ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 89.

²⁷⁸ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 89.

²⁷⁹ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 63.

²⁸⁰ B.D. EHRMAN, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, New York and Oxford University Press, 1997, 44.

3. 7 THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE GOSPELS

In furtherance of our reflection about the historical figure of Jesus, it is highly important we evaluate critically the authors of the Gospels and how they came about. Our ability to know this will, to a very large extent offer us vital information about the historical Jesus. In the words of Sanders, “we do not know who wrote the Gospels. They presently have headings: according to Matthew, according to Mark, and according to John. These men: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, really exist but we do not know if they wrote the Gospel.”²⁸¹ The Gospels as a matter of fact were not given a name until the second century. The Gospels as we have them today, were cited in the second century but anonymously. The attribution of authors to the Gospel emerged in the year 180. During these periods we have a lot of Gospels but the Christians at this time decided which of these Gospels are authorised.²⁸² Therefore, these groups of Christians affirmed emphatically that “the Four Gospels no more no fewer, were the authoritative records of Jesus”.²⁸³

With regards to the question of attributing the Gospels to certain individuals, the above-mentioned group of Christians do not affirm that, the Gospels were written by the Apostles; but they believed, even though these Gospels were not written by the Apostles, it is highly necessary to ascribe the Gospels to those who had a close relationship with Jesus while on earth. In view of this, scholars embarked upon a serious research to ascertain who wrote the Gospels. And as part of their research, these scholars inferred that, what we have today as the Gospel of John was written by Saint John²⁸⁴ “who preferred to refer to himself as the beloved disciple, and accordingly we now call the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel according to John.”²⁸⁵ Therefore, E.P. Sanders concludes that, the Gospels as we see them today were written anonymously. It was actually in the year 150 that the question of attributing names to the Gospels emerged.²⁸⁶ In connection to the above, Mark Allan Powell in his book: “*Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians view the Man from Galilee*”, affirms emphatically that, “most scholars do not believe that any of these three works (The Gospels) were written by disciples of Jesus or

²⁸¹ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 63.

²⁸² Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História de Jesus*, 93.

²⁸³ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 64.

²⁸⁴ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 65.

²⁸⁵ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 65.

²⁸⁶ Cf. E.P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 96.

by eyewitnesses to the events that they report. The Gospels themselves are anonymous.”²⁸⁷ In connection to the above, Bart D. Ehrman in supporting the notion of E.P. Sanders writes: “the gospels are all anonymous and they give no solid information as to their authors’ identity.”²⁸⁸

3. 8 CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE BETWEEN THE SINOPTIC AND THE FOURTH GOSPEL

This sub-heading seeks to explore the disparity and the similarity between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. From time immemorial, there is this controversy among scholars that, the Gospel of John cannot offer us information about the historical Jesus. Because of this, our intention in this sub-heading is to present the differences and similarities between the synoptics and the Gospel of John and to evaluate which of them will offer us information about Jesus. In doing justice to the aforementioned analysis, Sanders and Margaret Davies in one of their books titled: “*Studying the Synoptic Gospels*”, draw our attention to the following:

“The synoptics differ quite substantially from the Gospel of John. First, the outline of John is different from that of the synoptics. In the synoptics Jesus’ career seems to last only a few months. In John it covers somewhat over two years, since three Passovers are mentioned during his ministry. More substantially, the synoptics sayings material is very different from the Johannine discourse material.”²⁸⁹

In continuation of the above passage, it is obvious that the synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John are quite distinct in their treatment of the life of Jesus. Each of these Gospels present to a very large extent the life of Jesus from a different standpoint. When we critically study the life of Jesus in the synoptics Gospels we discover that, the general narration of the life of Jesus are almost the same. While in the Gospel of John, the narrative plan is different, and the subject of discussion have little similarities with that of the synoptics Gospels.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ A.P. MARK, *Jesus As a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View of the Man from Galilee*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, London, 1998, 35.

²⁸⁸ B. D. ERHMAN, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the early Christians Writings*, p. 190.

²⁸⁹ E. P. SANDERS and Margret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, SCM Press, London, 1989, 3-4.

²⁹⁰ Cf. E.P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 96.

When we study vividly the synoptics Gospels, we discover that, “they refer to the Passover only once, and the entire actions seems to have taken place in less than twelve months. While in John, Jesus goes to the Jerusalem for Passover early in his career, and there is another Passover before the final one.”²⁹¹ With this in mind, the public ministry of Jesus was a bit prolonged to more than two years. Apart from this, when we critically look at the Gospel of John, we discover that John situates the great part of Jesus’ ministry in Judea, while the synoptics Gospels narration situate all, except the last week in Galilee. Again, the Gospel of John situates the execution of Jesus on the 14th day of Nisan, and while the synoptics Gospels situate the execution of Jesus on the 15th day of Nisan. Another important aspect of John’s narrative that is worthy of note is the question of the purification of the temple, that appears in the synoptics Gospels as the fundamental reason for the execution of Jesus. In the narrative of John, it occurs at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry during his first journey to Jerusalem. When we observe very closely the Gospel of John, we discover that the content of Jesus’ speech before the Jewish authority is considerably different from that of the synoptics Gospels.²⁹² In the synoptics Gospels, we discover that, there was a formal process before the Jewish tribunal and the Sanhedrin. In the synoptics Gospels, the high Priest interrogated and accused Jesus of blasphemy. While in John’s narrative, Jesus was first interrogated in private by Annas and shortly after, he was interrogated by Caiaphas.²⁹³

Furthermore, when we take a very critical survey to the synoptic Gospels we discover that, Jesus officially interrogates his disciples who he really is (Mk 8,27-30). Apart from this, when we study the Gospel of Mark very closely we will see that, the Jesus of the synoptics Gospels ²⁹⁴ “refused to give a sign to those who ask him”²⁹⁵

“The Pharisees came up and started a discussion with him; they demanded of him a sign from heaven, to put him to the test. And with a profound sigh he said, why does this generation demand a sign? In truth I tell you, no sign shall be given to this generation, and leaving them again, he re-embarked and went away to the other side” (Mk 8, 11-13).

Again, the Jesus of the synoptic Gospels when he was going through his passion in the hands of the Jewish authorities, does not always give a precise response when interrogated

²⁹¹ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 66-67.

²⁹² Cf. E.P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 96-97.

²⁹³ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 97.

²⁹⁴ Cf. E. P. SANDERS and Margret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, 5.

²⁹⁵ E. P. SANDERS and Margret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, 5.

by the authorities.²⁹⁶ When we observe the Gospel of John, we discover that “Jesus talks in long monologues, and the subject is usually himself: his relationship to God on the one hand and to the disciples on the other”.²⁹⁷ Again, in the three synoptic Gospels, Christ celebrates the last supper with his disciples with bread and wine (Mk 14,22-24). While in the Gospel of John, Jesus celebrates the last supper with his disciples and washes their feet without referring to the institution of the Holy Eucharist. However, the only place where he referred to bread and wine was in the sixth chapter (Jn. 6,35).²⁹⁸

Apart from the above, we discover that there are further distinctions between the synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel. In the synoptics Gospels, Jesus cured many, he exorcised many. In the Fourth Gospel there was nothing like exorcism. In the synoptics Gospels, when Jesus was asked to give a sign of his authority, he refused out rightly (Mk 8,11-13). But when we survey the Fourth Gospel, they are series of signs that proved the authority with which Jesus spoke (Jn. 2, 1-11). In the synoptic Gospels, the principal theme of discussion is the Kingdom of God. In the Fourth Gospel, this theme appears just once (Jn. 3,1-3).²⁹⁹ Again, when we observe very closely we will discover that in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus speaks figuratively. The features of some of these figurative expressions³⁰⁰ include the following: I am the true vine. This is a figurative expression that the author of the Fourth Gospel uses to identify Jesus symbolically. As we all know, vine is a symbol of life. Jesus is the true vine, and as such Jesus is life. Another figurative expression the author identify Jesus with is the bread of life. Jesus is the only true bread of life. However, in the synoptics Gospels they are no metaphors, that is, Jesus did not speak metaphorically.³⁰¹

In the Gospel of John, according to Luke Johnson Timothy, “Jesus is in some ways even more human than in the synoptics. Because he experienced fatigue, anguish, indecision, he wept at the hour of Lazarus’ death.”³⁰² When we look at all the Gospels, Jesus passionately demonstrated his kind gestures to so many. He proved to them to be a compassionate fellow. But when we study the Gospel of John very carefully, we discover that Jesus shows and manifests that deep sense of being like us not minding his divinity.

²⁹⁶ Cf. E. P. SANDERS and Margret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, 5.

²⁹⁷ Cf. E.P. SANDERS and Margret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, 5.

²⁹⁸ Cf. E.P. SANDERS and Margret Davies, *Studying the Synoptics Gospels*, 5.

²⁹⁹ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 99-100.

³⁰⁰ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 70.

³⁰¹ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 100.

³⁰² L. T. JOHNSON, *The Real Jesus*, 156.

The above is very evident at the death of Lazarus where Jesus show to us the depth of his love for humanity. By this affirmation, we are not saying that in the synoptic Gospels Jesus does not show any sign of compassion. There are several instances in the synoptic Gospels where Jesus proved to be compassionate. In the light of this, Johnson concludes that “it is only in the Gospel of John Jesus is portrayed as having a friend” ³⁰³(Jn. 11, 1-11).

From what we have seen so far, can one conclude that the sequence of events in the Gospel of John is been marked by the theology of the author as his discursive material? The response to this question is in the affirmative. As we have seen previously, according to John, Jesus died on Friday 14th day of Nisan and not Friday 15th day of Nisan, as affirmed by the synoptics Gospel. The reason for this is that, the author of the Gospel of John wants to present Jesus as the pascal lamb, that was traditionally sacrificed on the 14th day of Nisan. Again, when we look at John’s description of the death of Jesus, we discover that the soldiers did not break his two legs as we see in the case of the two thieves that were crucified with him. Consequently, John designates Jesus as the lamb of God, and the comparism between Jesus and the lamb determined the date John situates the crucifixion. As such, John affirms that the hour when the pascal lamb was sacrificed in the temple, that was when the lamb of God died. Therefore, looking at the existing connection between the date and the theology of John, we are inclined to prefer the synoptics Gospels that conclude that Jesus was executed on the 15th day of Nisan.³⁰⁴

From the above reflection, E. P. Sanders is not in any way saying that the Gospel of John does not contain vital information about the historical Jesus. But these distinctions and similarities between the synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel enable us to be critical in attributing certain affirmation to Jesus. The Fourth Gospel contains a lot of information about the historical Jesus. But the only problem we have with the Fourth Gospel in the words of Mark Allan Powell is:

“The historians are unsure of the date and origin of most of the material in John’s Gospel, and so do not rely on it as strongly as they do on Mark or on material attributed to Q. In one sense, this means that when images of Jesus and the synoptic Gospels differ, the latter is usually preferred by historians. For example, the synoptic Gospels repeatedly present Jesus as a teller of parables, but Jesus never tells a single parable in the Gospel of John.

³⁰³ L. T. JOHNSON, *The Real Jesus*, 156.

³⁰⁴ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 102.

The historians do not allow the Johannine portrait to cast doubt on the image of Jesus as a parable teller, but assume that the synoptic portrait is accurate, and that John just missed this point.”³⁰⁵

When we equally examine the Gospel of John very closely, we shall see that “the Jewish trial is like the sort of thing that happened in Judea and in other Roman provinces that were governed the same way.”³⁰⁶ And secondly, we are not quite certain if all that John reported took place in Jerusalem. From the perspective of E.P. Sanders, the synoptics should be considered as our fundamental materials in our quest to unfold the identity of the historical Jesus. According to Sanders, we cannot create a very healthy distinction between the synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel,³⁰⁷ “since the synoptics are also work of theologians. There are no sources that give us unvarnished truth; the varnish of faith in Jesus covers everything.”³⁰⁸ By the above statement, E.P. Sanders is affirming that, there are no sources that reveal to us raw and naked truth about the figure of Jesus, but faith in Jesus himself. Again, when we observe the synoptic Gospels we see that, they did not homogenise their materials as John did. The synoptic Gospels did not make a deep revision of the traditional materials as John did in his narration.³⁰⁹

In the final analysis, these and many more are the predicaments we shall go through when we use materials from the Gospels as our fundamental and basic materials in our quest to investigate the historical Jesus. By this affirmation, we are not saying that the Gospel materials do not offer us valid and crucial information about the historical Jesus. But the difficulty Sanders is trying to bring to our notice is the fact that, the information we got from the Gospels are very relevant and fundamental and can offer us the basic information needed about this figure under investigation. However, relying solely on the information from the Gospels may not be enough to offer us information about the historical Jesus. We are expected to go beyond the biblical information, we are called upon to open to other possibilities around us that may offer us useful information about Jesus.

To get basic and holistic information about Jesus, E.P. Sanders challenges us by saying that “in the reconstruction of history, we must always consider context and content. The

³⁰⁵ A. P. MARK, *Jesus as a Figure in History*, 43.

³⁰⁶ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 72

³⁰⁷ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 72-73.

³⁰⁸ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 73.

³⁰⁹ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 103.

better we can correlate the two, the more we shall understand.”³¹⁰ Sanders has actually pointed out the principal problem most historians are having in their construction of history. In constructing a history of an individual, we do not limit ourselves to surface information about that individual, courtesy demands that we go beyond this surface information to enable us to have authentic information about the individual in question. Superficial information only gives us what we may call shallow information. In constructing a history, we are obliged to study very closely all that concerns the individual in question. Therefore, E.P. Sanders clearly states that, “we would understand Jesus better if we knew everything about his world and its history, including what the people of his day thought of him, and this can be actualized when we study Jesus within a context.”³¹¹

In connection to the above assertion, in this sub-heading, the life of Jesus will be studied within two contexts: the first context will concentrate on the theological context, that is, the history of our salvation. References would be made to the writings of Paul. Finally, the second context takes up the context of the public life of Jesus.³¹² It is with the aid of these, we would be able to study Jesus vividly. These two contexts give us a clearer picture about the historical Jesus and all he had accomplished while on earth. These two contexts are sort of guides for us in our quest to unfold the real identity of this figure under investigation. Having said that, we shall now proceed to study each of these contexts and evaluate the information they offer us about Jesus.

3. 9 THE HISTORY OF SALVATION AS THE FRAME WORK FOR THE HISTORICAL INQUIRY OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

As we have rightly stated, we can only know more about Jesus when we try as much as possible not to rely solely on the information from the Gospels. We need to consider everything about his background and this will enable us to know a lot about him. This is what the next paragraph intends to address.

The Gospels as we all know present Jesus as someone who fulfils the hope of Israel through which God will save the whole world. The Gospels as a matter of fact situate

³¹⁰ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 76

³¹¹ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 79.

³¹² Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 111-125.

Jesus within the history of salvation. This history of salvation is as follow: God called Abraham and his descendants and gave them law through Moses and established Israel as a kingdom during the time of Saul and David and punished Israel for their disobedience, through the exile; this same God will one day reinstate his people through the defeat of their oppressors in war. Through this, many Gentiles will become converted to God and adore him. However, this is a Jewish theological construct and it is very implicit in the Gospels.³¹³

Having said this, our intention in this sub-heading is to briefly demonstrate how Jesus can be known and studied through the history of salvation. For the first Christians, Jesus as a matter of fact discharged an important function in the Jewish history of salvation. Paul thought that time has come for the conversion of the Gentiles to the God of Israel. Even the authors of the Gospels were at home with this scheme. When we look at some of the Evangelists particularly Matthew and Luke, we discover that they concentrate this history of salvation in different degrees in connection to the great figures of history who were great ancestors of Jesus: Abraham, Moses and David.³¹⁴

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus was considered as the descendant of Abraham and David (Matt 1, 1). His birth fulfilled the prophesy that states that, the Lord of Israel will be born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Matt 2, 6). In the first period of the early life of Jesus, in the Gospel of Matthew, John advises his listeners not to trust his descendance of Abraham (Matt 3, 9). Matthew in his narration, identifies John the Baptist as Elijah, Israel's prophet whose coming was anxiously awaited by so many.³¹⁵ From all we have seen so far, it is clear that Matthew situates Jesus in the context of the Jewish history of salvation. Luke in his narration shares some of these passages we have seen so far. For Luke, when John the Baptist was born, his Father remembered the oath God made to Abraham, promising salvation to the people of Israel (Lk. 1,73-74). An angel prophesied that God will give to Jesus the throne of his Father David (Lk.1,32). Luke in his narration, outlines that the place of the birth of Jesus is the city of David.³¹⁶

In continuation of the above exposition, we will like to look at the Gospel of Mark and evaluate its standpoint on this issue under investigation. In response to the above, we

³¹³ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 112.

³¹⁴ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 113.

³¹⁵ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 113.

³¹⁶ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 114.

discover that “Mark lacks a birth narrative and consequently there is less opportunity to discuss Jesus’ lineage, but his Gospel as well is set in the context of the Jewish salvation history.”³¹⁷ However, when we critically study the Scriptures we discover that, situating Jesus within the history of redemption was not only limited to the synoptics, Jesus situates himself within the history of salvation.³¹⁸ Again, when we look at some of the narration of the synoptic Gospels we discover that, they are a lot of distinction in their presentation of the birth of Jesus. For instance, Matthew and Luke write that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth. This presentation reveals two facts, Jesus is from Nazareth, but from the perspective of the history of salvation, the redeemer of Israel had to be born in Bethlehem the city of David. The affirmation of Luke that Jesus was born in Bethlehem was certainly true, this affirmation emerged from the fact that Jesus fulfilled the hope that one day the descendant of David will appear to save Israelites. It is through this that Zachariah prophesized that the Lord will raise for us a Saviour from the house of David.³¹⁹

More so, in continuation of the above analysis, “Matthew in his account sees Jesus as the second, superior Moses.”³²⁰ To explain the foregoing statement better, he went ahead to revisit the history of Moses as we have it in the Scriptures. He began with the story of the escape of Moses from the land of Egypt from the hands of the cruel leadership of King Herod. He went ahead to give a vivid account of the migration of the people of Israel from Egypt to the promise land under the leadership of Moses. To explain this properly, Matthew made reference to the popular saying of Hosea³²¹ when he writes: “This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I called my son out of Egypt” (Matt 2, 15).

The Lukan narrative about the birth of Jesus concentrates exclusively on David, without making or given importance to Moses. Therefore, in Lukan account Jesus is not the second Moses as Matthew pointed out. However, Matthew and Luke situate Jesus in the Jewish history of salvation.³²²

³¹⁷ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 82.

³¹⁸ Cf. E.P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 84.

³¹⁹ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 119-120.

³²⁰ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 87.

³²¹ Cf. E.P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 87-88.

³²² Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 121.

In the final analysis, situating Jesus within this background offers us credible and useful information about Jesus. Therefore, studying the life of Jesus in this background will enable us to gather more data about the role of Jesus in the redemption of the chosen people, Israel. Having said this, we shall now proceed to the second part.

3. 10 STUDYING THE HISTORICAL JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HIS MISSION

In continuation of what we have seen so far in the previous sub-heading, here our intention is to study the historical Jesus within what he did while he was on earth. About this, E.P. Sanders affirms that, “the context that should immediately attract the attention of the modern historian who wishes information about Jesus, is the event that immediately preceded and followed his own ministry. And the first of these was the preaching of John the Baptist.”³²³ Therefore, Jesus as we all know commenced his mission on earth after John baptized him. In other words, the baptism of John ushers in his messianic activities. Again, when we study the scriptures very carefully we discover that, John prepared the way for the coming of Jesus to the point that, John attracted multitude even more than Jesus in the opinion of E. P. Sanders. In line with this, the Scripture submits that when Jesus approached John to be baptised, John objected admitting the fact that, Jesus was superior to him.³²⁴ Similarly, when we go through the scriptures we discover that, John had a very close relationship with Jesus while he was on earth to the point that, when Jesus came to be baptised by John the Baptist, John testifies to the fact that the Spirit of God descended over Jesus.³²⁵ In view of this, E.P. Sanders in his book “*Jesus and Judaism* writes”, “Jesus began his public work, as far as we have any information at all about it, in close connection with John the Baptist.”³²⁶

From the above, if we want to study critically the life of Jesus, the greater part of our information will come from the life of John the Baptist. John as a matter of fact spent greater part of his life on earth telling people about the advent of Jesus.

³²³ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 92.

³²⁴ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 93-94.

³²⁵ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 94.

³²⁶ E. P. SANDERS, *Jesus and Judaism*, 91.

The preaching of John began with the announcement of the manifestation of the reign of God here and now. At the beginning of the year 28 D.C., three years before John began his mission spreading around his message in the South of Jordan, administering the baptism of conversion for the forgiveness of sins, he attracted around him a great multitude. John as a matter of fact, was very known in the Jewish territory. Among this people who came around to be baptised by him, there came a man named Jesus from Nazareth, who asked John to baptize him. This son of a carpenter of Nazareth was baptised by John in the Jordan. This is an indisputable fact.³²⁷ Jesus went to Jordan to be baptised because he was convinced of the fact that, the new era had arrived. After the baptism, Jesus joined this new movement of conversion introduced by John the Baptist that was a sign of the will of God over the world. Jesus lived out his baptism not as an expression of personal penance for his sins, but in conformity with the principles of the times John announced, the beginning of the definitive forgiveness offered to all.³²⁸

From what we have seen so far, it is very clear that we cannot write a logical history of Jesus without referring to John the Baptist. We cannot talk about the ministry of Jesus without making reference to John the Baptist. In the life of John, the Baptist, we see the life of Jesus. Therefore, an authentic historian who sets out to write about the historical Jesus, cannot be successful without studying or making reference to John. This is because John paved the way. In continuation of the significance of John in our quest to know more about the historical Jesus, Hans Schwarz writes:

“Jesus himself made reference to John. He told his audience that John was more than a prophet and that among those born of women there was no one greater than John. He also compared him to Elijah, whom the people expected to return at the end of history. It may very well be that through John’s mediation Jesus perceived the nearness of the kingdom and his own relation to its coming.”³²⁹

The above passage clearly demonstrates the centrality of John the Baptist in the ministry of Jesus. Therefore, to embark upon a serious research about the historical Jesus, studying the life of John the Baptist will be very important. John as a matter of fact showcases the personality of Jesus. E.P. Sanders affirms that right from the beginning of Jesus’ mission, he was in perfect agreement with the message of John the Baptist, stating that the time is

³²⁷ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 120-125.

³²⁸ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 123.

³²⁹ H. SCHWARZ, *Christology*, 86.

fulfilled, and the kingdom of heaven is already at hand. Therefore, the background of Jesus, his environment and his ministry are the possible ways that would help us to know a lot about him.³³⁰ When we do this, so many things would be known about Jesus. In the final analysis, “we have now considered two different kinds of contexts: the gospels’ view that Jesus was the fulfilment of Jewish salvation history, the view of Jesus’ predecessor and successor that the climax of history was at hand.”³³¹

From the perspective of Sanders, these are the two ways the life of the historical Jesus can be studied. By saying this, Sanders is not in any way disputing the fact that, the Scriptures does not contain basic information about the historical Jesus. But the fact remains that, when we study Jesus within a context we would gather a lot of information about him. Even in the secular world if we want to study about the life of an individual we do not only concentrate on what was written down about the individual, we equally take a critical survey about the background, the upbringing, education, and everything that concerns the individual. By so doing, we would gather a lot of data about the individual. The same should be applicable to the historical Jesus if we want to know more about him. Apart from these two contexts Sanders presented to us in our quest to know more about Jesus, he went further to suggest two more context that will enable us to unfold the identity of Jesus. These additional contexts would be address in the next paragraph.

3. 11 THE STYLE OF JESUS’S MINSITRY

This sub-heading seeks to explore the various initiatives Jesus used in his mission. As we have already mentioned earlier, situating Jesus within the various activities he realised on earth will help to know more about him. Our intention here is to outline the various ways Jesus employed in his mission.

We want to begin our reflection here by affirming that, Jesus while on earth carried out his salvific mission in the Galilean city named Capernaum. It is in this very great city that Jesus commissioned his apostles.³³² It was here Jesus officially called his three most

³³⁰ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 95.

³³¹ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 96.

³³² Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 98.

important disciples: Peter, James, and John. At this period, Peter had a house in Capernaum. It was in this very house that Jesus cured the mother in-law of Peter. It was still in Capernaum that Jesus ate with Levi the tax collector. Therefore, when we study the life of Jesus following all these chronology of events, access to the life of Jesus becomes very simple, especially the various scenarios that surrounded his life.³³³

The first thing to be considered here is the Synagogue where Jesus spent most of his precious time instilling into the people the ethics of the kingdom of his Father. At this period, the synagogue became so prominent and spreading or extending to wherever the Jewish people lived. But we are not quite certain how the synagogue came into being, but we know synagogue is not a temple. This is because in the times past, a temple is a place where God was worshipped, where all kinds of offering and sacrifices were made. Unlike the temple, the synagogue is not considered to be a consecrated place and going there was not basically for those who are being considered holy. In the synagogue all kinds of activities take place: the Jewish people perform all kinds of activities in the synagogue³³⁴ like “eating, praying, singing, teaching one another, arguing with one another, sharing of information and gossip. Synagogue buildings functioned in part as town halls.”³³⁵

The synagogue serves as a place where the Jewish people gather together on Saturdays to listen to the readings of the Scriptures. After the reading of the Scriptures, and discussion follows suit. Some of the synagogues are more democratically organised than others. This implies that, in some of the synagogues we have one or two religious leaders that teach, while in some synagogues an avenue of free discussion is open to everybody. However, it is very important to put into consideration the indications the Gospels give us about the teaching of Jesus in the synagogue. The first periscope, the Gospel of Mark gives us about the teaching of Jesus begins this way³³⁶: “They went as far as Capernaum, and at once on the Sabbath he went into the synagogue and began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the Scribes, he taught with authority” (Mk.1,21.22).

In continuation of the above, another historical place where according to E.P. Sanders we can extract more information about Jesus is Galilee. According to E.P. Sanders, Jesus while on earth proclaimed the good news and performed a lot of wonders in Galilee and

³³³ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 134.

³³⁴ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 98-99.

³³⁵ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 99.

³³⁶ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 135-137.

its surroundings.³³⁷ Apart from this, the Gospels also mentioned other villages like Corazin situated about three kilometres of the North of Capernaum and Bethsaida which is probably a small locality very close to the sea. The Gospel of Mark and the rest of the synoptic Gospels describe Jesus as someone who is well known in these villages and its environments. Jesus called most of his disciples from these localities. However, it is obvious that Jesus never came across in these villages and its environment the necessary responses he expected.³³⁸

Therefore, because of Jesus' salvific activities in Galilee he became in the words of Geza Vermes, "a political suspect in the eyes of the rulers of Jerusalem because he was a Galilean."³³⁹ In the final analysis, Jesus in the words of E.P. Sanders "was not a cosmopolitan, but rather based his work in the towns and villages of Galilee especially those on the coast of the sea. However, Jesus was disappointed at the responses he got from these villages and town in Galilee."³⁴⁰ What we have seen so far is an indication that Galilee and its surrounding environment occupy a central place in the mission of Jesus. When we go back to the Scriptures and history, we discover that Jesus spent most of his time in these villages. This implies that, relevant and basic information about the historical Jesus are found in these villages and towns. An authentic investigation about the life and ministry of Jesus must consider some of these towns and villages Jesus worked. Having said this, we shall now proceed to another context that will enable us to know more about the historical Jesus.

3. 12 THE POINT OF DEPARTURE OF JESUS'S MINISTRY

After the baptism, Jesus went into the desert. He fasted and was tempted by Satan. The three Gospels affirm that Jesus was led by the Spirit of God. In the Gospel of Mark, the history of the temptation of Jesus is extremely brief. The Spirit led him into the desert where he fasted for forty days and forty nights and was tempted by the Devil.³⁴¹ "And at once the Spirit drove him into the desert and he remained there for forty days and was put

³³⁷ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 103.

³³⁸ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 140.

³³⁹ G. VERMES, *Jesus the Jew*, 57.

³⁴⁰ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 106.

³⁴¹ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 151.

to the test by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angel looked after him” (Mk 1,12-13). The temptation of Jesus in the Judean desert at the beginning of his public ministry shows the interior struggle of Jesus at the moment he was about to commence his prophetic mission of announcing the kingdom of God, a mission he accepted freely without any iota of compulsion. Jesus overcame the temptations and gave God the place that rightly belongs to him.³⁴²

After this battle which he conquered, Jesus returned to Galilee to begin his public activities. The synoptic Gospels affirm that, Jesus was rejected in Nazareth. So, he went to Capernaum and called his disciples. Jesus as a matter of fact was well known in Nazareth to the point that the inhabitants there put across this question, is he not the son of a carpenter, are his sisters not here with us? With all these interrogations, the inhabitants of Nazareth refused to listen to him and as such Jesus withdrew from that locality.³⁴³ Therefore, Jesus in reaction to the bad reception he had in Nazareth his home town, has this to say: “... a prophet is despised only in his house, and he could work no miracle there except that he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them” (Mk 6,4-5). After this rejection, Jesus was well received at Capernaum. It was there that Jesus called his disciples. It was in Capernaum that Jesus saw Simon and Andrew fishing and he offered them an invitation to come with him. Instantly, Simon and Andrew abandoned their fishing net and followed Jesus without any complaint. Apart from these two young men, Jesus went further and called James and John who were equally fishing and instantly they left all they had to be with him.³⁴⁴

In continuation of the above, the role of the people who followed Jesus has a substantial role to play in our study of the life of Jesus. In our reflection, we intend to evaluate the importance and the function of these followers of Jesus and the position they occupied as far as the ministry of Jesus is concern. As a matter of fact, Jesus our Lord and Saviour, propagate the good news of the kingdom of his father to many people.³⁴⁵ The first of these followers of Jesus is Levi who followed Jesus without being his disciple. We equally have another group of women who followed Jesus, and two of these women were mothers of the disciples of Jesus; the mother of the two sons of Zebedee and Mary, and the mother

³⁴² Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 225.

³⁴³ Cf. E.P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 157.

³⁴⁴ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 118.

³⁴⁵ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 123.

of James. The most outstanding among these women is Mary Magdalene. These women who followed Jesus discharged fundamental function in the Gospels. When we critically survey the Gospel we discover that, when Jesus was arrested, the disciples ran away. It was these group of women who witnessed the death of Jesus and the tomb where he was laid.³⁴⁶ Therefore, reflecting on the significance of these women in the ministry of Jesus, Maurice Casey writes:

“These women may not have been individually as rich as Mary, Joana and Susanna, but the cumulative effect of their various donations and work was evidently important to the practical organization of the final stage of Jesus’ migratory ministry in Galilee. Mary Magdalene is again the first to be mentioned, which underlies once more her importance during the historic ministry of Jesus.”³⁴⁷

You would agree with me that, Jesus’ followers as a matter of fact were highly indispensable for him. Notable among these group of his followers were Mary Magdalene and others who contributed immensely to the growth and development of the salvific mission of Jesus. Again, we were told that these followers of Jesus demonstrated their solidarity with Jesus during his trial, they assisted Jesus till he expired on the wood of the cross.³⁴⁸ Commenting on the significance of Jesus’ followers during his mission, John P. Meier in volume III of his book titled the, “*A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*” writes:

“Various Jewish women who had come to believe in Jesus’ mission had perhaps gradually over the course of time attached themselves to Jesus’ itinerant band of disciples and followed him on his preaching tours of Galilee and up to Jerusalem for his final Passover. Prominent in this group was Mary from the town of Magdala in Galilee. According to the independent reports of Mark’s and John’s passion narratives, some of these women viewed the crucifixion and death of Jesus and attended his burial.”³⁴⁹

Another important aspect of the mission of Jesus that will enable us to know more about the historical Jesus according to E.P. Sanders is the case of his miracles. There is no doubt that Jesus performed a lot of miracles. These signs and wonders to a very large extent offer us some basic information about the personality of Jesus. Jesus viewed these signs

³⁴⁶ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 164.

³⁴⁷ M. CASEY, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 194.

³⁴⁸ Cf. M. CASEY, *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 197.

³⁴⁹ J. P. MEIER, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol. III, published by Doubleday, A Division of Random House, Inc. New York, 2001, 630.

and wonders he performed as the inauguration of the reign of his Father on earth. Jesus was a great man full of wisdom, and while on earth many came to him to listen to his words of wisdom and he delivered many from their infirmities. Jesus considered himself as someone specially sent to minister to those who are under the bondage of the enemy. As a matter of fact, the signs and wonders Jesus performed during his mission offer us a glimpse of who Jesus was.³⁵⁰

E.P. Sanders was not alone in highlighting the significance of signs and wonders Jesus performed at the beginning of his mission as one of the means that offer us basic information about Jesus. Another important scholar who equally follow the line of argument of E. P. Sanders is Geza Vermes. According to him, Jesus declared to the people who he was through the liberation of those who were sick or under the operation of the evil one. His major preoccupation in his mission is basically to those who are sick.³⁵¹ Signs and wonders to a very great extent bring out the personality and identity of Jesus to the people he was sent to minister to. E.P. Sanders stressing the indispensable function of Jesus' signs and wonders as one of the pertinent tool in our investigation of the life and mission of Jesus states: "miracles provide a definition of who Jesus was, or at least of what sort of figure he was."³⁵²

In the final analysis, what we have seen so far about Jesus offer us sufficient and valid information about the historical Jesus. When we study the history of Jesus from this perspective, we shall gather useful and valid information about him.

We have considered Sanders' approach to the study of the historical Jesus in this chapter, but before we conclude our reflection we would like to re-emphasize the importance of using materials from the Gospels as fundamental source for the study of the historical Jesus.

In this regard, we shall begin by affirming that:

"The foundational document for Catholic Christian beliefs in Jesus Christ is the Holy Bible, the revealed books of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Catholic faith in Jesus Christ finds its prime source in the Bible, especially the writings of the New Testament. But Catholic faith in Jesus Christ sees that biblical witness as embedded in

³⁵⁰ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *Jesus and Judaism*, 157-170.

³⁵¹ Cf. G. VERMES, *Jesus the Jew*, 58.

³⁵² E.P. SANDERS, *Jesus and Judaism*, 170.

the ongoing life of the Christian community, the Church. The Church reads and prays over sacred Scripture and draws out its meaning from through the scope of history, prayerful worship, and critical thinking. This process, called tradition, has played and continues to play a crucial role in the articulation of Catholic Christian belief in Jesus Christ through centuries.”³⁵³

This is an authentic testimony that supports the indispensability of the Gospel as one of the fundamental source for the historical Jesus. The importance of the Gospels and other relevant documents in the Scriptures cannot be relegated to the background as far as this research is concerned. Stressing the importance of the above, Ben F. Meyer in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* affirms that “the Acts of the Apostles, the New Testament letters, and the Johannine apocalypse all contain the sayings of the risen Lord, all these sources presuppose and allude to the story of the earthly Jesus.”³⁵⁴ The significance of the Gospel testimonies of Jesus was further emphasised by Puig Armand. According to him, if we are being questioned about the figure of Jesus and our responses revolve around the Gospels, it implies that the Gospels truly and effectively present to us the life and message of Jesus of Nazareth.³⁵⁵

Finally, we want to conclude our reflection by joining our voice with that of M. Eugene Boring, who equally stresses the significance of the Scriptural testimony about the figure of Jesus in the following words: “the Gospels are historical documents in the sense that each was concerned to interpret the theological meaning of a particular historical figure and was composed to address a historical situation.”³⁵⁶ The above affirmation demonstrates the importance of the biblical testimony in respect of the historical Jesus. This assertion does not in any way put aside the position of Sanders with regards to this subject matter.

³⁵³ N. Matthias, WALTER T.P., *Christology: True God, True Man*, Catholic Basics, xiii.

³⁵⁴ BEN F. Meyer, “Jesus Christ” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. III. 775.

³⁵⁵ Cf. A. PUIG, *Jesus: Uma Biografia*, 28.

³⁵⁶ M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: New Testament Survey*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN., 2005, 34.

3. 13 SYNTHESSES OF THE THIRD CHAPTER

From what we have seen so far it is very evident that, studying the life of Jesus in connection to the beginning of his ministry offers us ample opportunity to gather more data about Jesus. You would agree with me that, studying the life of Jesus from this perspective would yield positive results for any historian embarking on a research about the historical Jesus. In this way, we would not only gather relevant data about the historical Jesus, but we would equally have the ample chance of having access to a first-hand information about Jesus. Again, when we critically study the life history of Jesus with reference to all the villages and towns he worked, we discover that there are a lot of things about Jesus that were concealed from us. And most of these things that were hidden from us were not actually written in the Scriptures that will enable us to have free access to them. That is why it is highly essential to study the life history of Jesus taking cognisance of all the villages and towns he worked and performed miracles.

In this chapter, we tried to study the life of Jesus within a context with reference to the environment in which Jesus lived, the various activities he discharged during his salvific mission, the people he ministered to and so on. Studying the life of Jesus in this manner does not implies that E.P. Sanders is kind of underrating the basic information about the historical Jesus in the sacred Scriptures. Again, he is not saying that the information about the historical Jesus in the Scriptures are not logical enough to supply us the necessary data required for the life of Jesus. However, the information in the Scriptures are valid and supply authentic information about Jesus. But we consider it necessary to study the life history of Jesus in connection to the environment in which he was born and brought up, the people he worked with and of course the amazing and glorious things he did while on earth. When we study Jesus within this context, we are quite certain of possessing vital and fundamental information about him.

In view of the aforementioned, so many scholars try to study the life of Jesus in connection to the environment where he was born and brought up. Notable among these scholars is Charlesworth James H. who in his book, *“Jesus and the Dead Sea Scroll”* writes:

“Today it is widely acknowledged, and certainly not for the first time, that Jesus was a first century Palestinian Jew. This fact means that his work and his teaching

must be studied and interpreted within the context of the history of that first century society of the Near East. As a result, our questions concerning Jesus and his teachings must be framed in terms of his own time.”³⁵⁷

In connection to the above passage, the importance of studying the life history of Jesus within his environment was equally stressed by Joaquim Carreira das Neves in his book “*Jesus De Nazaré: Quem És Tu?*”. According to him, Jesus must be necessarily studied in the light of the religious culture of his time.³⁵⁸ When we are able to adhere to this, the truth about Jesus would be laid bare and the Jesus we are desperately searching for would become accessible to us.

³⁵⁷ J. H. CHARLESWORTH, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 123.

³⁵⁸ Cf. J. CARREIRA DAS NEVES, *Jesus De Nazaré: Quem És Tu?* Editorial Franciscana, Braga, 1980. 17.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This piece of academic work has enlightened and clarified the various doubts we have about the historical figure of Jesus. Relevant and basic information about Jesus was carefully and critically exposed as far as this academic work is concerned. This research has removed the veil that covered an explicit explanation of the mysterious figure of Jesus to some extent. It has provided us with necessary materials and data that would enable us to some extent fathom the figure of Jesus. The various ideas expressed in this dissertation unravelled the various false images people developed about the person of Jesus and offered us modalities that should be applied in the investigation of the historical figure of Jesus. Through this dissertation, we discovered that various authors examined the person of Jesus according to their personal Christological orientations and very often these perspectives give us a very wrong and sentimental account about Jesus. However, some of this naïve information about the figure of Jesus has widened our horizon and taught us how to apply a very critical approach to the study of Jesus.

The question that continues to bother me in this piece of academic reflection is the fact that can some of these images we have seen about Jesus through this reflection offer us the perfect description of who the historical Jesus was? Approach to this question is a bit difficult because the information we have gathered so far from scholars are very vital and fundamental, but they only offer us foretaste of who the historical Jesus was. This is because no amount of analytical and descriptive analysis and studies about the figure of Jesus would be sufficient to tell us in all ramification who the person of the historical Jesus was. However, the analysis we have seen throughout this reflection offered us a glimpse of who the person of Jesus was, and it was quite enriching and informative.

The personality of Jesus continues to elude our grasp because he is an unfathomable personality that human mind and imagination cannot describe. Saint Paul understood the incomprehensibility of Jesus and the mysteries surrounding his personality when he says: “that I may come to know him and the power of his resurrection, and partake of his sufferings by being moulded to the pattern of his death” (Phil 3,10). It is obvious that Jesus’ transcendental nature eludes peoples understanding and description. It is in the light of this that E.P. Sanders recommends that “Jesus can be understood based on context, and it is this fact which allows us to have confidence that we have good general

knowledge about him.”³⁵⁹ When Jesus is studied outside the aforementioned, the result that will be given to us may be very vital, but the information contained in these results will only give us a speculative information about the figure of Jesus. Hence the necessity of investigating the person of Jesus within his immediate environment. It is very important and essential to study the historical Jesus within a context. It is through this context that we realise who he was. Without context it is always very difficult to understand the meaning of an event. In this way, Jesus becomes accessible to us when we situate and study him within a context. Jesus would become vividly understood when we know virtually all that concerns him, the world in which he lived, what the people of his time thought about his personality. We need a vast knowledge of the context more than a superficial presentation of the person of Jesus. Jesus can also become accessible to us if we are able to understand the precise circumstances in which the Gospels were written.³⁶⁰ One of the contexts that we can situate Jesus during his activity is that of his itinerant movement. It is very explicit in the Gospels that Jesus and his disciples were described as itinerant. Some of these disciples of Jesus had family houses but they spent most of their precious time in journeys. They were gainfully engaged with the proclamation of the kingdom of God.³⁶¹

In likewise manner, E.P. Sanders affirms that “it is possible to consider or study the life of Jesus in the context of the Jewish hopes for the future or Jewish protest movements, or to view him in relationship to the Jewish charismatic prophets and miracle workers.”³⁶² Jesus from my own point of view is situated within this very context because this is the environment he spent most of his life. The Jewish people identify the figure of Jesus based on what he was known for while he was among them. Again, when we study the Jewish people very closely, we shall discover that their perception about the person of Jesus is not far from someone who took upon himself the function of liberating people and offering people liberty from the entanglement of the evil ones. Therefore, studying the historical Jesus from the above perspective would be of immense importance to us as far as this academic work is concern. In the secular world it is very vital to study the life of an individual with consideration of the environment or the context in which he or she grew up. For instance, I cannot claim to know the first President of the Federal Republic

³⁵⁹ E. P. SANDERS and Magret Davies, *Studying the Synoptic Gospels*, 341

³⁶⁰ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 110-111.

³⁶¹ Cf. E. P. SANDERS, *A Verdadeira História De Jesus*, 145.

³⁶² E. P. SANDERS and Magret Davies, *Studying the Synoptics Gospel*, 341-342.

of Nigeria facially, without knowing to a large extent the context and all the activities that surrounded his growth into maturity. Even if I claim to know him facially I may not know everything about him, because I did not situate him within a context that will supply me virtually all that concerns him.

Consequently, stating the significance of studying Jesus within a context was further re-emphasised by E. Earle Ellis when he wrote:

“The sayings of Jesus originally belonged to a context, often an exposed context, and separate or clustered sayings and stories and quotations without a context were often disassembled midrash and represented secondary and tertiary stages in the history of the Gospel tradition.”³⁶³

The above passage only throws more light on what we have seen so far in this research about the significance of not relying solely on the biblical testimonies about the historical Jesus, but also taking into consideration the entire world in which Jesus lived and undertook all his earthly activities. We believe that any report or any research about the figure of Jesus that is devoid of the above contextualisation is questionable. This is because a lot about the figure of Jesus would be known when we study him holistically. Even E.P. Sanders testifies to the foregoing when he writes that: “in the reconstruction of history, we must always consider context and content. The better we correlate the two, the more we shall understand.”³⁶⁴

In the final analysis, many things have been learnt about the figure of Jesus in this academic research work. Many doubts about the person of the historical Jesus were clarified. This research has given me access into the world of Jesus. To some extent, it has widened my knowledge about him and has given me the opportunity to differentiate between authentic and false representation of the figure of Jesus. As we have rightly stated at the introduction of this reflection, our intention here in this work is not basically to

³⁶³ E. EARLE Ellis, *Christ & the Future in New Testament History*, Brill, Leiden- Boston-Koln, Netherlands, 2000, 23.

³⁶⁴ E. P. SANDERS, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, 76.

criticise the authenticity of the New Testament writings as insufficient to present to us the person of the historical Jesus. Rather, we acknowledge the worthiness of the writings of the New Testament as they contain vital data about the person of Jesus. However, the whole of this work is an exposition of the opinions of various scholars with regards to the historical Jesus. Again, the exposition of Sanders we examined in the third chapter of this work, is just an exposition of what he thought about Jesus and offered us some recommendations that would aid us in our research about the figure of Jesus. In view of this, we can conclude that both materials from the New Testament writings, and studying Jesus within a scene offer us vital information about the figure of Jesus.

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